

ANTOINETTE



M. P. BLYTH.

ANTOINETTE.

A Tale of the Ancien Régime.

BY

M. R. BLYTH.


IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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P R E F A C E.



N this story there is no aim at reproducing history.

No event in the past of the world's life is so thoroughly known, even to the general reader, as the minutest details concerning the causes, rise, and progress of the French Revolution. But we have ventured to interweave into the life of our heroine some few facts of that terrible time.

The character of Marie Antoinette touches our story, it must be remembered,

only during the last three years of her life. The pride, frivolity, and imprudence with which she has been charged, were then being fused as in a crucible with the nobler elements of her character. We confess to having sketched the Queen of France chiefly from pictures left to us by those who knew her and her inner life most intimately, therefore most favourably ; and have judged her according to their knowledge.

Her queenly generosity in forgiveness, her warm-hearted charity, her love for her children, her devotion to the King, her too great indulgence and fidelity towards those whom she had chosen as her personal friends, her gracious power of winning individual regard—these are some of the attributes which sorrow and suffering ripened into a grand heroism.

Perhaps, then, we may allow a too minute search into her faults to be in abeyance here.

It is now close upon a hundred years since the terrible things were done which destroyed France and decimated her people. Yet the interest, the pathos, the ‘pity of it,’ the shining instances of nobility of character and self-devotion recorded—in short, the romance as well as the horror of that time—are as vivid to the new generation of readers as to the old, who can remember some of those who personally suffered at that time.

It is, therefore, not without a modest hope that this story will interest some of this same new generation that the author offers ‘Antoinette’ to the public.

M. P. B.

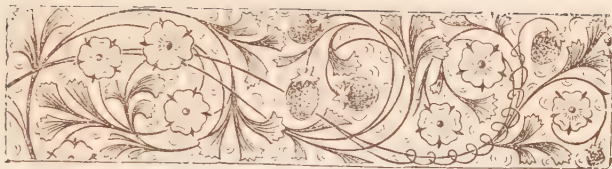




Part I.

LIFE IN ENGLAND.





ANTOINETTE.



CHAPTER I.



T was a stormy night towards the end of November, in the year 1778. The wind was moaning in the branches of the great trees on either side the avenue, and dashed the heavy rain in fitful torrents upon the window-panes. Nothing could be more wretched or more desolate than the aspect of things outside. But within the Manor House at Leigh all was comfort, warmth, and brightness. The Dowager Lady Leigh was herself the embodiment of everything charming and de-

lightful, both to the eye and the heart. She was a rare picture to look on this evening, as she walked from room to room in her black satin dress, with the air and grace of one familiar with Court-life from her girlhood. She was the Dowager, and she was a grandmother. In fact, Geoffrey Leigh, her son's only child, was there beside her—a boy of twelve years old. He, too, was restless, and found walking from one room to another a refreshing alternative to sitting quietly in the parlour with a book, upon which he could not fix his mind, and listening for the wheels of the carriage which was so long in coming.

This carriage was to bring from the outside storm (after such a crossing from France to Southampton as might be imagined in such weather) Sir Geoffrey Leigh, his father, who was in ill-health, and was obliged to resign his post at the British Embassy in consequence; and his mother, who had been visiting her half-sister, the

Marquise de Boisfontaine, whose country home, the Château Boisfontaine, was situated some twenty miles from Paris.

Besides the return of these much-longed-for travellers, Geoffrey was very curious—after the fashion of only children wishing for, and yet dreading, the appearance of new toys or playmates—to see another traveller who accompanied them: a little French girl, whom, her delicate constitution having been a cause of anxiety to them, her people had been prevailed on to send to England.

Lady Leigh had so praised the English country life—the charms of country life at Leigh, especially—the excellence of the Leigh doctor, the infallibility of the elder Lady Leigh as a nurse and referee, the pleasure and occupation it would give to herself to have the care of the little Antoinette de Boisfontaine—that she had prevailed. The Marquise was, in her heart, glad. She had for Lady Leigh the admira-

tion of a younger for an elder sister, and regarded her as the wisest and most excellent of human beings. She did not care for children.

‘I shall like Toinette when she is grown up, and beautiful,’ she had rather shocked Lady Leigh by saying. ‘But these young things are a care, and I do not like cares. A grande dame at the Court of France has no time for anything but her duties. I wish that your Geoffrey was a girl, since you so wish to have a daughter, my Marguerite. Take with you, then, this little Toinette of mine, say for one year. She loves and clings to you now, and here she but pines and grows stupid. When you return her to us, she will be eight years old, and must be educated; it is possible that the aunt of Monsieur le Marquis, who is Abbess of Monceaux-le-Sec, may undertake that trouble. When she is grown to be a demoiselle, I myself will take her to Court. I shall be old then, my dear, and

ugly'—the Marquise, in her youth and beauty, laughed at the bare idea of this eventuality—'and I shall like to superintend a pretty daughter. Her future, I need not tell you, my sister, is all arranged. She will, in good time, marry the Marquis de Vézecque, eldest son of the Duc de St. Gaudens. When she inherits, she will have the tabouret. The Duchesse, his mother, now has it. A more ill-grained personage, my dear, or one more difficult to admire, you would not wish to see, wearing Court dress, and sitting in the presence of the Queen! Fortunate it is for Madame de Noailles that she is not in waiting, and holds no office near the Queen, or that model of etiquette and propriety would be driven mad! However, as I said, when my sick and sorry little child is a lovely girl——'

'Eulalie,' said Lady Leigh, 'I thank you for entrusting to me your treasure. She shall be as my own; and truly, whether

she is lovely or not will not lessen her value to us at Leigh.'

So it came about that this little fragile daughter of the house of Boisfontaine was wafted on the storm-wave across the Channel to another home ; and that a very different one to the large French château in which she had been born.

To return to Geoffrey Leigh. He was not quite sure whether he was glad or sorry at the idea of the arrival of the new-comer. He sat looking into the fire, and wondering what he really did feel ; and just as he had come to the conclusion that all girls were nuisances, and that sick girls could only be more tiresome than healthy ones, the splashing of horses' feet on the wet gravel and the crunching of wheels were heard approaching. The outer doors flew open as if by magic ; the hall was peopled with servants ; and there stood the dripping, panting horses, the dripping, soaked postilions, and the carriage piled with

luggage. The streaming glass window was let down, and first a tall, military-looking man, somewhat pale and exhausted, got out with help ; then Geoffrey's face was taken between two soft hands, and his mother's kisses were upon his cheek and brow, and her sweet voice sounding in his ear. When he was released from her embrace, he became aware of a little pale child standing near, bewildered and alone. Her eyes were full of tears ; but she made no sound, only looked. Geoffrey's kind heart was melted at the very sight of her ; she was so little, and so white, and so lone.

‘ Antoinette ! is that you ? ’ he said, looking down from what seemed to her quite a height.

And without more ado, she allowed him to lift her in his arms ; and laying her head upon his shoulder, travelling bonnet and all, she burst into tears. With every sob she clung closer to Geoffrey. After a moment or two of surprise, and possibly of dismay,

he said : ‘*Ne pleurez pas, Antoinette,*’ and carried her across the hall into the dining-room, away from everyone, to the bright fire burning there.

He could feel the little obedient thing trying to quiet herself as he spoke. She took advantage of the sheltering bonnet to hide her face from the light and from him, until at last his curiosity got the better of him, and he asked her to take it off. She did not wish to untie it—everything seemed too much ; she was so unstrung, so tired, so strange, and so shaken. Yet she was trying to undo the knot, when a cheerful voice addressed her in French, and the two Ladies Leigh came to embrace her. She was a docile, gentle child ; her sobs soon ceased as they led her upstairs between them, and she had not been many minutes in the white-curtained bed prepared for her before she was fast asleep.

‘*Geoffrey,*’ said his father, ‘have you given any orders about those men and

horses? We came post from Southampton, you know. What do you say we ought to do for them?’

‘I have given no orders, sir,’ said Geoffrey, smiling into his father’s face. ‘It is for you to do that. Rivers can make room for them—men and horses, too. May I see about it?’

Away went Geoffrey on his congenial errand. After this manner he was taught to think of the feelings and needs of the ‘common people.’ Born to a lower grade, they were equal in their humanity. It was this bond of union, this regard for the lower by the higher, of which dear old Sir Roger de Coverley was the ideal type, that had its share in saving England in the day of many troubles.

Amongst the inhabitants of Leigh were an old sea captain and his daughter. They were a curious pair, and at the same time held a position of their own in the village, which owed very little to wealth or worldly

good. What kind of vessel it had been that Captain Wilkins had commanded, and in what seas he had chiefly gained his nautical experience, was wrapt in the mist of uncertainty and ages. Those experiences had unquestionably been fierce, and consisted mainly of fights with 'the enemy.' Who that enemy was, whether pirate, smuggler, Frenchman, or Spaniard, or what was the cause of strife, whether national or otherwise, no listener to his yarns ever could make out; but that Captain Wilkins had lost a leg and an eye were accomplished facts, and matters of which he was proud into the bargain. Miss Wilkins was said to have been born on a desert island; but at all events her career must have been a chequered one. She had seen a good deal of foreign parts in her youth, and one outcome of her experience, at least, was undying hatred of the French. This sentiment warred inconveniently in her warm heart with a devoted admiration of the younger

Lady Leigh, and attachment to the whole of that family. Her idea of earthly happiness was to be allowed to preside in the still-room at Leigh, where she could utilize her knowledge of herbs, her skill in compounding pills and plasters for the village sick, and superintend the making of pickles, preserves, and home-made wines, to her heart's content.

Miss Wilkins was very superstitious. She believed in omens, apparitions, prophecies, and the like. She had a full conviction that the world was ripe for what she called its 'final crash,' and that it was in its last days. Her grandmother, who had lived until the ripe age of ninety, and died in Miss Wilkins' arms a short time before the opening of our story, had once heard a remarkable sermon, preached in the year 1701, in which were foretold, in striking language, the troubles in store for France at the end of the century.*

* See Note A at end of volume.

It was characteristic, we may here mention, of Miss Wilkins, who under a rough and eccentric exterior hid the warmest and tenderest of human hearts, that a few years later, when France sent forth her homeless and ruined thousands to seek shelter in England* (her father having died meanwhile and left her his inheritrix), she gave to the subscription for their relief a sum out of all proportion to her own slender income; to achieve which she reduced her daily living almost to that of an ascetic, and deprived herself of every superfluous comfort which she could lay hands upon. To her house Geoffrey Leigh was a constant and welcome visitor. Captain Wilkins taught him, as he was wont to say, 'every-think that he knew himself.' And to the sympathizing ear and unfailing interest of Miss Patty, he was accustomed to confide most of the events and incidents of his life.

* See Note B at end of volume.

‘A foreign French girl, and in your house, Master Geoffrey! Why, what will you do with her?’ Miss Wilkins had said, when, the day after Antoinette’s arrival, he went to apprise her of the fact. ‘Just imagine, pa! what do you think of that?’

‘But my mother is French, you know, Miss Wilkins,’ said Geoffrey, with a twinkle in his eye.

‘She is; she is. But if she had been born a—a Turk—and I think that is the worst that could happen to anyone—my Lady Leigh would still be the angelic being she is!’ said Miss Wilkins warmly.

‘You’ll have to take to frog-fishing, sir,’ said Captain Wilkins, turning his one eye with a grotesque wink on Geoffrey. ‘French children live upon such-like.’

‘I expect Mrs. Peters will be much tried—she that is so grave and so quiet, accustomed to such different doings. Can the child speak?’

‘French, yes; and a little English, too.

She is a nice little thing—as nice as any girl can be, I dare say.’

‘What do you think I saw last night in my dreams, Master Geoffrey? Nothing more nor less than a dreadful storm at sea.’

‘But that is because of the rain and wind here, Miss Wilkins.’

‘That might have been, if it had not been the third night I dreamt the same thing.’

‘Do tell me.’

‘Well, I dreamt three nights running that there was a storm of the most dreadful kind just outside our shores. I saw you swimming in it, quiet and composed as anythink. But you were aiming at what I thought was a sea-bird, sitting on the very top of a wave. Your eyes were better than mine. It was a young girl, and you were reaching out to save her. A great vessel, just like the *Stormy Petrel*—you know, father?’ (an assenting grunt from Captain

Wilkins)—‘was going down close by, and I thought you would be sucked down after her, so I gave a shriek, and it woke me. Ah!’ said Miss Wilkins, looking quite pale, and breathing hard, ‘it was too real for me; I like pleasant dreams.’

‘And did I reach the poor girl, Miss Wilkins?’

‘You were just a-catchin’ of her by the clothes as I woke up, Master Geoffrey, and I couldn’t bear no more.’

A few days after this Geoffrey Leigh, who had taken to patronizing the little Antoinette, and rather liked it, brought her to see Captain and Miss Wilkins, and the nautical instruments which were so inexhaustible a source of interest to himself. From that day Antoinette was in possession of the warmest of all the warm corners of Miss Wilkins’ warm heart. The choicest flowers in her garden, the eggs of her favourite bantams; the first strawberries, the latest apples—everything that she had

of best, or most precious, was Antoinette's. The stool by the fireside, worked by Miss Wilkins herself with the Union Jack in coloured worsteds, was uncovered for Antoinette. The little collection of foreign shells, gathered by Captain Wilkins during his sea-going days, was for Antoinette; and no pleasure in Miss Wilkins' life could equal that with which she welcomed, waited upon, and petted the pleased and gracious child.





CHAPTER II.

THE following year was spent by the family at Leigh in the quiet happiness of a country life—a life so lived as to gather within the influence of its peace the poor of the adjoining village, the tenants on the well-cared-for estate, and all the neighbourhood round. The little Antoinette de Boisfontaine expanded and took root in the congenial soil to which she had been transplanted, so that it almost seemed as if she had never had any other home. Both aunt and grandmother were devoted to her; both longed to keep her with them, and even Sir Geoffrey declared

that he could not imagine life at Leigh without her.

To these warm hearts the question recurred with increasing force, as the first twelve months of her stay amongst them drew towards its close, ‘How can we keep her with us longer, this charming little Antoinette?’ Then Madame de Boisfontaine was written to by her half-sister, the younger Lady Leigh. In return, a letter, characteristic, somewhat rambling, and altogether French, was received at Leigh.

Madame was pleased with the idea of her child’s improvement. She had not considered it necessary to trouble Monsieur le Marquis on the subject. He was so much with the King, and absorbed in affairs, that he had no time to devote to the details of Antoinette’s childhood. He would expect, in the natural course of things, to find his daughter, at the proper age, ready to be introduced to the Queen, and to take her place at Court, a fitting representative of

the beauty of the august families of Boisfontaine and De Vertprés. She would then be married with a suitable dôt, and Monsieur le Marquis need be troubled no further. His busy life drew him almost entirely to Court, and he had little time to spend on his estate, or in home life ; even the education of the young Vicomte de Salis, his only son, was necessarily left to the direction of his tutors. Madame did not add, what the world around her knew pretty well, that there were patent signs that that disagreeable young nobleman would give trouble and vexation enough under this system of education ; of which Monsieur le Marquis, himself of a life truly exemplary, was as yet quite unaware.

Taking the whole of this communication into consideration, and knowing the writer, the two Ladies Leigh gathered, with much satisfaction, that Madame la Marquise too gladly confided to her admired half-sister the child whom she cared so little about

at this, to her, uninteresting period of its life.

As it was this first year, so it befell the next. Court-life as completely absorbed the beautiful Marquise as affaires did her husband ; and on receiving accounts of Antoinette's improvement, and of the wish of her English relatives to keep her at Leigh, she felt that it was quite the desirable thing to leave her there for the present. In fact, to shorten our story, it was arranged, from time to time, that Antoinette de Boisfontaine should remain at Leigh, where she grew and thrived and was happy, the delight and sunshine of the house. And it was not until she had well passed her fifteenth birthday that there was any serious idea that she must leave it. A letter arrived at this time, describing how Monsieur and Madame de Boisfontaine, penetrated with the so great goodness of all the family at Leigh, and desolated at the thought of appearing selfish or impatient,

now felt that the time had arrived when mademoiselle their daughter must prepare to return to France. An early opportunity was likely to offer itself, though the date was uncertain. Monsieur de Salis, their only son, was about to visit England in the suite of the new ambassador, for the purpose of enlarging his mind and otherwise spending money. The announcement of his plans would be made in due time, and when the date of his return to France should be arranged, Antoinette was to return with him to her native land.





CHAPTER III.



THE flower-garden at Leigh, facing the sunny south, was laid out upon a gentle slope, which was separated by a ha-ha from the park, and by a terrace-walk from the house. It was bright all the year round, and gay with flowers. Just at the time of which we write, the very early spring of the year 1788, its snowdrops, crocuses, and hyacinths were coming by degrees into bloom, and the general effect was of sunshine and colour. Into this fair garden walked a lady ; her face some people would have thought handsome, some charming—all would have agreed

that it was a delightful face to look upon. It was sunny as the garden, and full of a sweet changefulness which had something of melancholy in it, too. Looking upwards to an open chamber-window facing that way, she called, 'Antoinette!' with a sort of affectionate lingering on the last syllable, that had, too, a foreign sound with it.

'I come, Aunt Marguerite; just now I come,' answered a clear voice, and a young girl came running downstairs, snatched up a basket covered with a white napkin that was placed ready for her in the hall, and joined Lady Leigh in the garden.

'Come, little one; but first look into the parlour before we start, and say how sweet the air is; they had better come out into the sunshine; to-morrow it may snow.'

'Grandmother,' said Antoinette, opening the door of the warm, sunny parlour, which looked upon the flower-beds, 'and Uncle Geoffrey, too, it is so lovely out of doors;

do come out soon. We shall be back in an hour, and then, Uncle Geoffrey, may I go with you to the stables ?

Without waiting for answer, away flew Antoinette like a bird on the wing.

The little party of three gathered round the fire consisted of Sir Geoffrey, whom ill-health often kept within doors during the winter months, his mother, and their old friend, Dr. Warburton, once Sir Geoffrey's tutor at Oxford; since, Vicar of Leigh. The elder Lady Leigh had in her day been a beauty, and her great abilities had made her sought after and valued in the intellectual world, with members of which she still kept up a correspondence, both in England and in France. She sat now in a high-backed, tapestry-worked chair, dressed in black silk, with a muslin handkerchief crossed upon her bosom, a cap of fine lace, bound with a broad black riband, upon her hair, which was powdered, and looking altogether the type of a beautiful old age. She was

painting very minutely the flower and root of the aconite in her book of plants, and though she looked up smiling to answer Antoinette's eager invitation, she, too, seemed to prefer the fireside to-day.

‘How like Madame de Boisfontaine the child grows!’ she said, turning to Sir Geoffrey with a sigh.

‘Does she, mother? I think not.’

‘Like the Marquise de Boisfontaine!’ exclaimed the Vicar, turning round from the mantelshelf, on which he was leaning his elbow.

‘Like her as she was when Sir James and I went to join the British Embassy, and I first saw her—a year or two after your marriage, Geoffrey. She had then just left her convent. She was somewhat taller (and older) than Antoinette, more decidedly beautiful, perhaps, and more finished as to appearance and manner; but the eyes and eyebrows, the nose—the—well, yes, Toinette is what her mother was then. Yet, when I

think of that face, and of Antoinette,' said the old lady, looking out over her spectacles into the garden dreamily, and then throwing them aside and looking round earnestly at the good Vicar, 'there is a difference.'

'Surely, madam, surely, if all that I have heard be true. This fair child, with whose teaching and training I myself have had to do, has a strong, clear mind, a will—kept in check by an obedient, humble nature—capable of deep affection, and having the power of self-abnegation the most entire. But it is a will of complete identity, nevertheless. Moreover, she has a strong sense of religion, and as quick an intelligence as I have met with. It grieves me, indeed, to hear,' said the good Vicar, 'that you are expecting the summons which is to take her from amongst us.'

'Yes ; but, my dear friend, we must face that trouble. Toinette is now fifteen years old. She is no longer the little sickly child that came to be nursed in the Leigh air.

She will have to learn Court manners, Court ways, Court graces——’

‘What a change ! what a destiny !’ said the Vicar, holding up deprecating hands, and shaking his head until the powder flew out upon the collar of his coat. ‘Can nothing be done to avert this—this—catastrophe ?’

‘Nay,’ said the old lady with her beautiful smile, ‘is it you who say this, Vicar ? Did you not yourself say to me, “The child’s duty is with her parents” ? That we ought to further her going ! That her home must be in her father’s house ?’

‘I did ! I did ! My very words ; my very thoughts ! But—one talks ; one has theories——’

‘And faith, Vicar.’

‘We should, we ought to have. You rebuke me. But when I look around, and especially towards France, I see dark clouds lowering, and the gloomiest of doubts oppress me.’

‘Well,’ interrupted Sir Geoffrey, ‘what-

ever we may have taught the child amongst us here, she has taught us to love her. And I, like you,' turning to the Vicar, 'distrust the outlook abroad. I saw a good deal whilst I was there, and Young—you remember Arthur Young?—has told me more, which fills me with forebodings.'

So the three spoke together, until the sweet voice of Antoinette, talking with animation to her aunt, reminded them that the fair morning had faded, and a murky mist had obscured the sunshine. The Vicar took up his hat and wished his friends good-day, and Antoinette begged leave to escort him to his garden-gate, as she had done most days in each week since she came to Leigh; for he was her tutor, and Geoffrey's too, when he was at home, and the dear friend of both.

Later in the afternoon, as the younger Lady Leigh sat alone, she was surprised by a knock at the parlour-door, and as it was slowly and cautiously opened she beheld the

face and form of Miss Wilkins, clad in a green velvet spencer, and surmounted by a beaver bonnet tied well down under her chin. On being invited to enter, she closed the door behind her, and, drawing near to Lady Leigh, said in a low, mysterious voice :

‘Has it come?’

‘Has what come, my dear Miss Wilkins?’

‘The letter. Your ladyship can imagine what I mean—what letter only I *could* mean. The letter that is to take the light of our eyes away to her country—that wicked, wicked France!’

‘No,’ said Lady Leigh, somewhat surprised, though not unused to flights and panics on all kinds of subjects from Miss Wilkins. ‘But, as you know, I always feel that it must come some day, and I may at any time receive it.’

‘Then,’ said Miss Wilkins, putting her hands on the arms of the chair in which she sat, and bending forward with a scared and eager look upon her face, ‘then, if that

letter has not yet come to hand, it is on its way. It was in the candle on my table last night. You smile, my lady, and you do not believe in these things ; but wait and see.'

'You are so interested, and so fond of Antoinette, Miss Wilkins,' said Lady Leigh kindly. 'You think too much about her for your own comfort, I fear.'

'It was not for nothink,' said Miss Wilkins solemnly, 'that my grandmother saw a letter in the candle on the top of a shroud, and next day heard of my grandfather's death by falling off the top of the York mail-coach. It was not for nothink that the dog at Matthison's Mill 'owled'—Miss Wilkins did now and then leave out an 'h' or so—'the 'ole night before *she* died. It was not for nothink that I dreamt, on and off, all last night, about coronets, and crying children, and wading in troubled waters. If what I expect is at hand, I think, what with that, and what with father, I'll about have run aground myself ! But,

at all events, Mrs. Brown's plaster is ready, and I have just been teaching your Betty how to put it on.'

'Is Captain Wilkins any better to-day?'

'No; your la'ship may expect to hear worse of him, too, very soon. He saw my grandmother last night as plain as I see you. Oh, he told me so himself! He says, "She beckoned me after her, Patty, and I'll have to go," he says. And so he will. He'll slip his cable, as he says, before long. The Vicar was with him this forenoon; father likes that. Well, I must go back to him. It's a hard world, my lady; and I could wish I was on board with father. If that letter comes, remember that I said so. I know it is near here somewhere.'

'Good-bye, dear Miss Wilkins. I shall come and see you to-morrow.'



CHAPTER IV.



THE melancholy forebodings of poor Miss Wilkins were not all destined to be so speedily fulfilled as she had feared. It is true that Captain Wilkins, imbued with the necessity of 'following' the summons he had received, had died and been buried in the little churchyard at Leigh, and that Miss Wilkins was at this period devoting much time and thought to what appropriate devices and what apposite quotations she would feel satisfied to have engraved upon the marble tombstone to his memory. But it was not more than a fortnight later, when a mounted messenger

from Southampton was seen riding into Leigh. He was the bearer of a letter, sealed with an elaborate coat-of-arms, surmounted by a foreign coronet, on the corner of which the words ‘Urgent,’ ‘With haste! haste!’ were written.

‘Mamma,’ said the younger Lady Leigh, ‘look! it has come, this dreaded summons. What shall we do? How are we to part with her? What will my husband say? What will Geoffrey do without her? What will become of Miss Wilkins—old Marjory, the school-children, and everybody else—without Antoinette?’

When at last they could prevail upon themselves to break the seal, they together read the contents, which ran as follows .

‘DEAR SISTER,

‘The time has arrived when we desire to receive Antoinette, our daughter, again. We thank you for your goodness to her. Also for that which the mother of

your respectable husband has shown to our daughter; we are her very humble and obliged servants.

‘Armand, our son, will bring his sister home to France, and to us, her parents. He is now in England. Having paid his respects at the English Court, he will arrive at Southampton. Thence he will, for convenience, sail for Calais. If you will permit your femme de chambre to wait upon mademoiselle our daughter to that town, my own servant shall escort her hither to Boisfontaine.

‘Your very affectionate sister,

‘EULALIE DE BOISFONTAINE.’

Later in the same day, another messenger brought from Southampton a note from Monsieur de Salis, announcing his arrival there, and saying that, as soon as the arrangements for their passage could be completed, he hoped that his sister would be in readiness to accompany him.

Antoinette had gone with young Geoffrey Leigh into the woods to say farewell to many pleasant nooks, and to enjoy the signs of coming spring, the early song of the blackbird, and other country pleasures.

‘You will have no one to tease you, Geoffrey, when I am gone,’ she said, as they wandered slowly homeward. ‘You look solemn at the very idea.’

‘Perhaps you may not altogether lose that pleasure even yet, Toinette. If Lord Dorset gets me this appointment, I may go to Paris. He is our own cousin, you know; and kinship should go for something. But you will be a sort of grande mademoiselle there, surrounded by admirers——’

‘And not caring for any of them. Yes.’

‘What is De Salis like? I am very curious to see him. I hope he can take care of you?’

‘He is not like you; that much I know,’ said Toinette, very decidedly. ‘It would have been better if he had been. If he

could have studied and gone to college, like you and Uncle Geoffrey, it would have been far better than to be allowed to do everything he liked all his life, and to please only himself from as long as I can remember ; and then, when he is grown up, to be a queen's page, and live for himself, and not for his people.'

'Oh, that's what he is—is it?'

'So the letters say. What I remember of him is not nice. He was not half such a good brother to me as you are, Geoffrey, though he is older than you.'

Geoffrey, as might have been observed, did not respond to this remark, and kicked several stones with considerable vigour into the nearest hedge as he walked beside her.

'I am afraid he is cruel, especially to animals,' said Toinette, who always talked to Geoffrey as to a confidant and sharer of all things ; and who now, on the eve of their parting, was moved to recall many incidents of the old French life, which was

to begin again so soon, and which before had been half forgotten, or too far off to be of interest. ‘I can remember crying when he beat his pony. And once he beat a village boy. Oh, I hope he is different now!’ she sighed, drawing instinctively nearer to Geoffrey as she spoke. ‘He found him gathering nuts, or sticks, or some trifle, inside the park. He was rude, and they said he was bad; but he was only a poor boy. And Armand was in a terrible rage! Unluckily, he had a riding-whip; and he got off his pony, and hit the boy all over, so that the groom had to interfere. You would not have done that, Geoffrey.’

‘Why did not the boy turn round and fisticuff De Salis?’ said Geoffrey, with infinite disgust. ‘He must have been a poor creature! Why, fancy Jack and Harry Matthison, the miller’s sons—do you think they would stand a beating like that from me?’

‘Ah, but in France they are not the

same ; they never fight. They are poor, and we are their seigneurs. So the boy let Armand beat him, though he was much older and bigger. La bonne talked about it—at least, the servants talked to her ; and she said they ought to see and hear without saying.’

‘You did not see it all, then ? I am glad of that. You would have cried your eyes out !’

‘Oh, Geoffrey ! but he could not have done it, then. I wished I had been there ; though I was so little, I would have hung on his arm, and pulled him away. He could not have hurt me.’

Geoffrey made no reply to this. He looked at Toinette dancing along by his side, and—he was very young, and very foolish—he wished that that walk could last for ever, and Toinette be always by his side. He thought that the gladness of his life was to end when this odious brother, this Armand, would take away Antoinette,

for whom he would not care, from him, who cared so much. All that he had, and all that he did, had so long had its beginning and end with Toinette. Nothing was good without her approval, nothing was enjoyable that she did not share. These feelings were a part of Geoffrey's life. He had never spoken of them—why, or to whom, should he speak? But to look forward to any future that could be endurable without Toinette; or any life which could be worth living in her absence, without the sympathy of her ardent, pure, and loving companionship—Geoffrey could not imagine that.





CHAPTER V.



THE following day was Sunday. It had spread like wildfire through the village that Antoinette was going to France—a country, in the thoughts of the villagers, much maligned and little praised. After the morning service, as they all came out of church, the scarlet-cloaked dames, the men in their clean smocks or Sunday coats, the village school-children, the bell-ringers, the rustic musicians of the village choir—all, and everyone, waited to curtsy in the porch, and catch a glimpse, or a smile, or a handshake of their favourite. Then, last of all, the Vicar came out, and greeted his

parishioners, turning up the avenue with the Leighs, and taking Antoinette's little hand in his, as if he, too, would have liked to keep her always at Leigh. She looked back to wave her hand as the curve in the avenue hid the villagers and children from her sight, thinking that she must be old, and grave, and sad, indeed, before she could forget the scene that greeted her: of waving hats, and curtsyng dames, and the murmur of good-byes.

As they reached the house, a sound of wheels and galloping horses was heard coming along the road which they had just quitted, and a chaise-and-four drew up. It was the Vicomte de Salis. Geoffrey Leigh, standing behind his father, who came into the vestibule to receive his foreign kinsman, watched him with critical eyes. He was a handsome young man, of two-and-twenty, or thereabouts; but with a vapid, wearied expression on his face, as if life, even now, was a burthen too great to be borne. He

declined all offers of hospitality, saying that he was with a friend who awaited his return at the inn; and hoped that Antoinette would join him the following day. She, poor child, had not much to say; her heart was full, and she felt dull and wretched. She was afraid of Armand. He either laughed at everything she said or did, as if she was a child; or spoke in a mincing voice, with an affectation of manner which was incomprehensible to her; or was haughty, and inclined to be rude. She thought he showed but to poor advantage beside Sir Geoffrey Leigh and his son. At length, after a visit of an hour or so, he took his leave, and, wrapped in a pelisse of costly furs, drove away, looking sadly fatigued by the gêne of the whole interview.

The following morning, so much dreaded, came round at last. The family coach, drawn by two fat horses, and driven by Rivers, the coachman, who had lived all his life in

the Leigh stables, stood at the door. The beautiful old grandmother came into the porch, holding Toinette's little cold hand in hers. Mrs. Peters, the confidential servant, who was to look after her during the sea portion of her journey, got into the rumble, looking white and rather scared at the thought of crossing the English Channel, and setting foot upon foreign soil. Then Lady Leigh came out dressed for the drive to Southampton, followed by her son; and Sir Geoffrey himself put them into the carriage, and bade them a regretful good-bye. Rivers, the coachman, looking down from his hammer-cloth, thought that it was a sad day for all concerned.

They drove straight to the quay. Antoinette's boxes were put on board the vessel at once, and Mrs. Peters safely bestowed in the cabin; and while she received her last instructions from Lady Leigh, Geoffrey found an opportunity to speak to Antoinette.

‘Toinette, something is on my mind. I have been thinking about it all night. Are you listening?’

‘Yes, Geoffrey.’

‘Well, remember this. I shall see you again. Whether I am sent to Paris or St. Petersburg, or to the Court of the Grand Turk, has nothing to do with the matter. I *will* see you again. Remember that.’

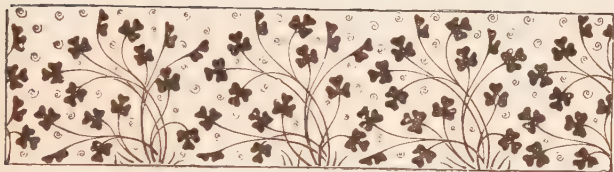
A great bustle now announced the arrival of that important passenger, the Vicomte de Salis. He had no interest in Toinette’s possessions or surroundings, and little enough in Toinette herself. His mails took up all the attention of his valet and other servants, and he was not easy to please. When at length he turned to look at her and address Lady Leigh, the vessel was about to slip her cable, and she was folding Toinette in a farewell clasp, and giving her her blessing and the last kiss. Geoffrey then came forward; she held up her sweet face, and he, too, kissed her. He could not speak one

word. Then the mother and son stepped back upon the quay together: the vessel moved away. They watched the slight figure of Toinette, clad in the brown cloth pelisse so familiar to them, with her little brown hood, and the knot of cherry-coloured ribbon making a spot of colour on the top of it. Then the ship turned slightly and sailed on, until they could distinguish her no more.

‘Alas, Geoffrey! my heart misgives me. Shall we ever see her again?’

‘Mother,’ said Geoffrey, in a low, determined voice, ‘I *will* see her again.’






Part II.

LIFE IN FRANCE.





CHAPTER VI.

E must now endeavour to sketch for our readers some of those members of her family who were at Boisfontaine at the period of Antoinette's return, after an absence of eight years, and somewhat of the wonderful changes in her life which began at this time.

Madame la Marquise de Boisfontaine was a beautiful woman. Amongst all the fair faces that clustered, star-like, round the Queen of France, few were lovelier than hers. Everything that art, position, and wealth could do to enhance the surroundings of this beauty was done. But beyond all

touch of art, a natural charm and grace of manner, a winning voice, the exquisite blending in her of all that was gracious and high-bred, made her indeed a fine fleur in the most splendid Court in Europe. She was always welcome, always pleasant to look upon. She had no inclination for intrigue, for she wanted neither money nor place : her one idol was the Queen ; she had no intelligence for politics, or any restless fever of party feeling to allay. The new ideas were Greek to her ; she knew of no code but that of etiquette, and anything outside the daily excitements of Court-life she had no cognisance of. This being her rôle of existence, it may be supposed that Madame de Boisfontaine was rather out of her element when those few intervals in the year came round which the Marquis made a point of their spending together at his country château ; where he liked to entertain, in the manner befitting his rank, such friends as occasionally visited him

there. Yet even in the dull country, and even when there were no guests, the Marquise shone in a dreamy, colourless light of her own. Nothing ruffled her temper. She was incapable of an unkind word. Whatever happened, she took it as it came, with a smile or a shrug, according as it was pleasant or unpleasant. She would play cards by the hour together, or sit before an embroidery-frame, or move like a languid picture about the house, taking little interest in anything particular, but living a petted and sunny life, altogether ideal and unreal.

Into this dreamy, vapid existence had come Toinette, the very opposite of it : full of a latent energy, anxious to live, not merely to exist ; looking for an object on which to fasten her affection, her devotion, and conscious every day of growing powers. Their first contact was a kind of shock to both. Each was so unlike what the other had decided in imagination that she would

be. Madame, if she could have put her thoughts into words, would have ejaculated:

‘English! Ah, ciel! English to the core! What a costume! What hair-dressing! What gaucherie, altogether wonderful! At her age I was about to be married. She is a raw child, fit for the care of *la bonne*. But that will recover itself. That will amend. She has a promise of fair looks; she has small hands, and pretty, yes, even pretty feet. But what a gait! What energy! What fatiguing alertness!’

Toinette’s mental photograph might have been described thus:

‘How unlike Aunt Marguerite! But how lovely! How adorable! But how fragile and petite! I must learn to take care of her; and—I will.’

And Toinette was happy, with a young girl’s enthusiasm, to sit and watch her mother; or to fly on spasmodic little errands for her comfort (quite unconscious what a

ruffling tendency these little attentions had); or she would sit near her with another embroidery-frame, in which, worked in or picked out, she might achieve an average of a dozen stitches in a day. She watched, and tried to imitate her mother; was wholly absorbed in her, and effaced her own identity to the very best of her power, so was she enthralled by the outward fascination of this beautiful personage, who seemed too exquisite to belong to the work-a-day world, and to whom she intended to devote herself through life; as if she had a prevision, this young Toinette, that the sunshine of such an existence could not last.

But as the days passed on, and things and people began to emerge from the glamour of novelty, in some mysterious intuitive way, it dawned upon Toinette that it was, after all, very much as if she was lavishing her heart on some lovely piece of china, which received her caresses and

devotion indeed, but was incapable of returning them. It came by degrees, not all at once ; and yet it acted on the girl's warm, passionate nature like a frost, and drove the life-current within to her heart again. She did not understand, then, that these frosts are wholesome ; that the trial-time of her life was beginning now, and that she was thus to gather strength for a time that was coming—a time which was to try all that was gold as in a crucible of fire.





CHAPTER VII.



F her father Antoinette had as yet seen but little. Being one of the King's advisers, and, as well, his personal and trusted friend, the Marquis de Boisfontaine spent but little time on his estate. Antoinette looked upon him with a certain awe, not without admiration. He was grave, formal, and punctilious to the last degree, but in his family both courteous and kind. He was a man of strong prejudices rather than opinions. He was, before all things, honest; therefore it was that he commanded the regard of the King, who himself was, before all things, honest. He

was not a man of great intelligence, and his mind was overshadowed by that typical blindness which was settling down, like a second darkness of Egypt, upon all who held office in the management of affairs in the devoted country. In his true but somewhat narrow mind there was one intensified hatred and distrust, and that was towards the Duke of Orleans, who at that time had cause of complaint in the coldness of the Court : a coldness which, whether justified by facts or not, had at least the effect of strengthening the hands of a rebellious faction, and so complicating difficulties which were already becoming insurmountable. He expressed himself in a stately way as being charmed at the return of mademoiselle his daughter to Boisfontaine. But if he in any way thought about Toinette, at this time, as regards her presence in the house, or her appearance, or her occupation or amusement, it was merely as being a thin slip of a girl, growing, and rather gauche ; who would

have to be taught the elegances of French Court-life in time to take her place there as his daughter ; to marry the appointed parti, and shine hereafter gloriously in the entourage of royalty ; and, meantime, he hoped she would amuse herself at Boisfontaine.

Of Armand, her brother, Antoinette saw very little. He came, indeed, once to Boisfontaine during those first few weeks. But Paris and Versailles were too near, and they held too many attractions for Monsieur de Salis to allow of his caring much for Boisfontaine, or anything at all for its people. When he did come, his dictatorial ways, his neglect of all home customs and even courtesies, his incapacity, his habits of reckless self-indulgence, revolted her intensely, and she learned to be thankful for his absence.

As to these people on the estate of Boisfontaine, Antoinette soon began to be very curious. To go and see them, and person-

ally to make acquaintance with them, was her first idea. But things were so differently arranged at Boisfontaine to what they were at Leigh. For example, she was dressed in such a different way, and might never go out unattended. It seemed impossible to run wild or to be free amongst the terraces and trimly kept parterres here ; or to feel at full liberty in a brocaded silk, or a muslin from the Indies, so fine that it would hardly bear to be worn at all. Then, the hamlet (for it was little more) was at some distance from the Château, down a steep hill ; and there were so many difficulties in the way of an exploring expedition there. However, perseverance has its own reward. One day, after much entreating and beseeching of the powers that were, Antoinette carried her point, and was allowed to walk down in the direction of the village. The *bonne* (grumbling audibly at every step of the way) took Toinette under her care, and, followed by two lackeys with long canes,

they set forth. Great indeed was the shock and disappointment to Antoinette when she perceived that the door of every house was shut to, if not ostensibly of set purpose, at least with remarkable unanimity, so soon as she, with her little cavalcade, appeared in view; not quite before she had caught sight of some of the people though, and perceived that they were poor and gaunt, and that their glances were unfriendly and antagonistic. Even the children were stolid, and would not speak or play about in her presence, but stood transfixed and silent, unable to take their eyes off the rich liveries of the servants. At last, after much coaxing, she allured one bright-eyed girl, who looked about ten years old, and was in reality but a year or so younger than Toinette, to approach a little nearer to her, and filled her hand with bon-bons. But no sooner had she taken them, than a harsh voice from within one of the hovels was heard calling to her. She flung down the sweets, and

ran sobbing into the cottage. Toinette cried too, from sheer vexation and disappointment. La bonne at once took occasion to point the moral as to this so weak infringement of the dignity of the Château.

‘These, mademoiselle, as I have before had the honour to say, are pigs, and the children of pigs! They know nothing.’

‘But the English poor know nothing, either,’ said Toinette, half crying. ‘Only they love us seigneurs. We help them, love them, pity them: and they love us. How have I wronged or hurt these, then, that they turn away and hide from me?’





CHAPTER VIII.



UTDOOR life and outdoor interests, such as she had been accustomed to in England, being thus debarred to Antoinette, she began to look within doors. Two or three weeks at a time was the utmost that the Marquise could survive at Boisfontaine, and she one morning sent for her daughter (whom, it must be confessed, she looked on and treated as a mere child) to sit with her whilst she sipped her early cup of chocolate, that she might hear a little résumé of the family plans; which was great promotion for Toinette. Between the various elaborate

stages of her toilette, the Marquise told her daughter that on the next day but one she would have to return to Versailles, and after that she would accompany the Queen to Saint Cloud—a favourite expedition, in which it was supposed that many economies were put in practice by royalty, and where a less formal etiquette than was *de rigueur* at Compiègne or at Fontainebleau made it popular with certain of the younger noblesse, while it not a little scandalized the more rigid among the old. Madame de Boisfontaine, whilst discursively touching upon these and other topics of, to her, great interest (but which to Antoinette were not as yet very engrossing), went on to say that her half-brother, the Abbé de Vertprés, whom Antoinette had only seen once or twice, but who lived always in his apartments at Boisfontaine, had consented to allow her to read with him, and promised to overlook her studies until the end of the autumn, when she was to join her mother

at Versailles, where the Marquis had a house close to the Palace; and that she would there be presented to the Queen, and take her place at Court. The Marquise hoped, she said, that Antoinette would amuse herself, and study well, and so act and think as to permit her the pleasure of finding, on their next meeting, that she had made the most of the time in improving her music, and in rubbing off a few English gaucheries, and learning so to comport herself as to be ready as soon after her sixteenth birthday as circumstances should permit to be introduced into the so charming and spirituelle society of the rank and fashion round the Court. Two women were to be left in Antoinette's personal service; and though the *bonne* was necessarily to accompany madame, she would return from time to time to see how all things fared with Toinette, and to arrange anything that might be wanting for her comfort. The Castle, the gardens, the

whole domain, were open to her, and all things in them. But monsieur her father, in taking leave yesterday, had especially enjoined that no one should go unattended into the farther portions of the estate, or to the woods beyond ; and that mademoiselle was to be careful even in leaving the gardens for the park, as the Chauffeurs had been seen in the adjoining village not many weeks ago, and the people of Boisfontaine had been, and were, in a not wise or obedient state at present.

So, on the appointed day, the Marquise departed in her splendid coach, with her servants and her waiting-maids ; and the large old Castle seemed larger and more sombre than ever. The house had a deserted look, and Antoinette felt new and intrusive as she wandered about amongst the old rooms and galleries, where girls as young as she had long ago moved and lived, generations of them ; all allied to her, or rather she to them—Boisfontaines of the

same old race. They had lived there, and married, perhaps ; died, certainly. Their very names she did not know, nor their histories. Their feet must have trod the same floors, their eyes have rested on many of the things which remained—old oak chairs, rich tables, and buffets of mediæval date ; beds with velvet draperies, ponderous and gloomy ; tapestried walls, and still older hangings of Cordova leather, stamped with gold. Antoinette's busy fancy peopled all these chambers, and the pictures of Boisfontaines who had figured at the Courts of Louis XIII. and XIV. gave shape to her fancies. It seemed so strange that these stately ghosts of her imagination should have been her own relations. And to think that they, too, had been young in this old house, and that they had gone to the Court of the kings and queens of their respective times ; and lived their lives, and sorrowed or rejoiced, been good or bad, faithful or unfaithful. And those lives

were over. They were dead. Had they, she wondered, loved the people ; been just, or generous, or kind to the fathers and grandfathers of those who were now so antagonistic ?

As to the Abbé de Vertprés, he was a student, wrapped in his books, and having no interest in life outside them. He had, unwillingly, it must be owned, consented to give Antoinette, his niece, some little instruction during the first hours of each day ; enough, in short, to employ her thoughts and a small portion of her time. He felt himself to be making a great and praiseworthy effort in so doing. When the Abbé found, however, that the mind he had undertaken to direct was no common one, but bright and clever, he began to feel less of gêne in the process, and found that the lessons in Latin, history, and the few other subjects he brought forward, were rather an interest than otherwise.

The Abbé de Vertprés was eminently a

philosopher, and imbued with those negative ideas on religion with which the very air was filled. It was of no consequence to him that Toinette had been taught by an English clergyman, and reared altogether in a very different atmosphere to that in which he lived. A little of religion might possibly be well for a woman—though madame his sister had, he believed, left hers altogether in the convent, and without doubt *she* was all that a woman ought to be. Toinette, he resolved, was too young to argue with, and that subject of discussion might slide. In six months she would go to Paris, there to be instructed in all the elegances and proprieties of life. For the present, he should find a little classical reading, and what philosophical ideas might occur in the course of it, with music and geography (that geography in which the present King took an interest so keen, and the study of which would, therefore, be naturally of value amongst the young generation), sufficient.

These subjects Monsieur l'Abbé held would be of ample weight and length profitably to occupy the time which he had undertaken to fill up for Toinette, at the so great sacrifice of his own choicer studies.





CHAPTER IX.



NE day Antoinette had prevailed with her uncle to leave his books and saunter outside with her. It was a lovely day early in May, and the two, uncle and niece, wandered up and down the great terrace for awhile, until the Abbé said that, for his part, he should find it pleasanter to sit down under a large walnut-tree that spread its branches not far from the Château. Antoinette, being of an active, not to say restless, disposition, strolled away alone, until she bethought herself of the old watch-dog chained in the court, who did so love a little liberty too. She went round to the

stables to find him ; and there, as it befell, she saw a sight which filled her with dismay and horror. A man was stretched upon the paved court-yard, moaning. She was running to him to see what was the matter, when Maître Grimeau, the surintendant, a harsh, evil-looking man, came out of one of the out-offices, armed with a large, heavy-handed whip, and after flourishing it in the air, he beat the prostrate man with it, who sprang from the ground uttering a loud cry, which froze the very blood in Antoinette's veins, and immediately fell to the earth again as if incapable of further effort.

‘Get up!’ shouted the surintendant. ‘Get up! you are not hurt! you are lazy. Get up, Joseph—pig!’

Antoinette rushed forward on the impulse.

‘Oh, Maître Grimeau,’ she cried, ‘what is this? What has happened? Why is the poor man down? Nay, if you touch him, assuredly I will bring Monsieur l’Abbé, and he will——’

The surintendant's face grew livid. He had been unconscious of Antoinette's presence. Then with a shrug, conveying as much insolence as he dared betray, Maître Grimeau bowed low, and said :

‘ This, then, is no place for mademoiselle. I venture to say it is no place for mademoiselle: and the man is a wretch, an ingrate, a slave doomed to the galleys, and — but yes, mademoiselle—he is a thief also.’

Thus saying, he turned on his heel, and, bowing, withdrew, leaving Joseph on the ground. In the meanwhile, several of the outdoor servants had, one by one, dropped into the court-yard, and Toinette was quite capable of giving orders.

‘ What is this, Pierre ?’ she said to one of the gardeners. ‘ Why is this man lying here, hurt and beaten ? What has he done ? Lift him up.’

‘ Truly, he is one of the six, mademoiselle.’

‘ What six ?’

‘ The water-drawers. Mademoiselle does

not understand that the well of the Castle is dry, and they have been thrice down to the river since daybreak this morning. He is not strong enough, this Joseph. He fell as they drew up the last barrel. Monsieur le Surintendant, he says that the man is lazy ; he sleeps, in fact, and must be beaten awake.’*

Tears of indignation stood in Toinette’s eyes.

‘ Raise him,’ she ordered, her slight figure drawn to its height, and endued in the eyes of the lookers-on with dignity and power.

The poor, tired, hurt wretch was lifted from the ground. He had severely sprained his ankle, and was unable to stand. He looked dazed and uncomprehending, and glanced behind and around him, as if dreading lest the terrible whip should be yet held aloft, and about to descend upon him afresh. He had a scowling, unpleasant face, and

* Lady Morgan describes a similar instance to this in her ‘ France,’ which she vouches for as a fact.

sunken eyes—not an ideal object whereon to lavish pity. But that was nothing to Toinette. He was hurt, and had suffered in serving the household. She thought of Leigh, and of what would have been done for him there. True, she was alone ; none felt or thought as she did about such affairs here ; but when things were wrong, they must be righted—when things were right, they must be done.

‘Take him to his home,’ she said. ‘I will answer to my father—to—to Monsieur le Marquis.’

Antoinette watched the little procession as they carried the lamed man under the archway out beyond towards the highroad. Then she became aware that Maître Grimeau had again come into the court-yard, and, hat in hand, was speaking to her. It was an insolent, low type of face, but not devoid of a certain shrewdness or cunning ; and something like a shudder ran through the young girl’s frame as she involuntarily

turned her head to listen, whilst he stood half a foot behind her, bowing to the ground.

‘Mademoiselle will forgive me if I say that, had I expected to see mademoiselle in this so sudden manner—and—and in this place’—here he threw a world of expression into his face and manner, as if he would have said, ‘in this vulgar haunt of dependants, slaves, where no high-born demoiselle would dream of setting foot’—‘I would have chastised the pig whom mademoiselle has forgiven elsewhere.’

‘Maître Grimeau,’ said Toinette gravely, and half inclined to be frightened at this hateful man—half inclined to weep from a sense of horror and pity, and sheer inability to breast the evil torrent which she began to realize was rolling its turbid waters through this home of hers, ‘Maître Grimeau, I wish to say that I think it is wicked and cruel to beat that man. He is lame—he cannot walk; how could he but fall? I have——’

‘Mademoiselle will always feel and act

like an angel ; but these men are pigs—beasts !

‘ At all events,’ said Antoinette, turning her back, and walking swiftly away, ‘ Monsieur le Marquis shall know of all this !’

Grimeau looked after her as she disappeared with an unpleasant smile ; then with a scowl, which deepened as he turned away :

‘ Monsieur le Marquis—truly ! Much he cares or knows. I am sick of it ! Sick of service ! Sick of aristocrats ! Ingrates ! Sick of remarkable owls in high places, where people with brains ought to be ! Nevertheless, courage, Grimeau—courage ! and—patience ! Things are not to be always thus. Let us bide our time.’





CHAPTER X.



ANTOINETTE held up bravely until she came in sight of her uncle, sitting, fat, comfortable, sleek and lazy, under the walnut-tree, not in the least feeling or appreciating the sunshine, the singing of birds, the green budding foliage, or any sights or sounds in nature, but rosily enjoying Catullus through his gold-rimmed spectacles. Swift as an arrow she flew to his side ; and, with a sobbing cry of ‘ Oh, uncle ! uncle ! ’ burst into tears. The good Abbé, wholly taken aback, shook like a jelly from mingled surprise and wonder. Here was a new experience !

‘Tears ! What frightful catastrophe has arrived ? What bodily injury befallen ? Fie, then ! has Sancho bitten thee ? Hast thou, then, fallen on the pathway ?’

Monsieur l’Abbé, student and philosopher, and all unused to children, thought that fright or bodily pain alone could account for tears !

‘ Oh, my uncle ! Such a dreadful thing ! One of the water-carriers fell down lame—Maitre Grimeau has beaten him ! He is a bad, wicked man ! I shall never rest till my father comes home, and I will tell him all that I saw—I—myself. He will not have a man so cruel any more in his service. Yes ; I shall entreat him to dismiss that bad man.’

‘ Hush thee—hush thee ! Rise up, and sit near me, my heart—my cabbage !’ said the Abbé, patting the vacant place on the rustic bench beside him, and stooping, as well as circumstances permitted, to rescue Catullus from the desecrating dust into

which he had tumbled, speaking to Toinette the while in the most comforting way which his inexperience could suggest. Then Antoinette, her tongue being loosened by her passionate indignation, and the sense of inability to cope with the evil just unveiled so suddenly to her appalled and horror-stricken senses, poured forth with astonishing volubility the details of what she had seen, and the comments of her heart and imagination thereon.

It was a new revelation to the self-wrapt, sleepy, good-natured Abbé. Here was Antoinette, whom he had looked upon as yet a child, looking, speaking, acting before him with the strength and power of a woman. She had, in truth, become a woman. She had been growing ever since she had left her childhood behind her in the sweet English home, where all that was good and noble within her had been nurtured. She stood there before him, her cheeks still wet with tear-drops, and crimsoned with her

passion, her eyes large, bright, and full of expression. The Abbé was speechless : he felt as if he had been suddenly galvanized out of the days of ancient Rome, where he usually droned away his existence, into a new age. Such words as ‘oppression,’ ‘cruelty,’ ‘bad and wicked,’ ‘the poor,’ ‘the miserable,’ ‘the ill-treated,’ positively stunned and bewildered him into silence. They beat about his ears, until he put up his white hand, and passed it over his astonished eyes and rubicund face, as if to feel his own identity. Then Toinette’s passion had spent itself ; and she turned to him, saying, in a voice of the deepest, most pathetic entreaty :

‘And you—you, my uncle—you will help me—is it not so?’

The Abbé looked at her for an instant. She was not a child ; he could not any longer pet her with sweet words, and offer her his *bonbonnière*, which, at the first sound of her tears, he had instinctively brought

out of the pocket of his soutane. She was not a woman of the kind he had met with, whose grief might be a love-story, or her rage jealousy. Nor was she a man to be argued with, or philosophised to. What, then, was he to do or say ?

‘ You will, will you not, dear uncle ? ’ she said again, the same entreaty in her voice.

He must say something. He hated trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or anything that required the effort of sympathy, or of bodily exertion, or the semblance of either. But somewhere in the recesses of that plump form the Abbé had a heart, and Toinette’s voice had found and touched it. A grave look but seldom seen there stole over his face.

‘ My little one,’ he said, ‘ what, for example, can I do ? I am no one. I love my books, and the quiet of my chamber ’ (this retrospect imparted a pettishness to his tone). ‘ But you—you have dragged me outside these, Toinette. You tyrannize,

you compel, you disturb my meditations, even here ! Nevertheless, tell me. I am listening. What do you want ?

‘But, my uncle, I myself do not know what I want—except that—something is wrong——’

The Abbé softly chuckled. There was reprieve in this indefinite answer.

‘Something is wrong, she says ! This child ! Something is wrong ! How droll ! As if the whole world was not wrong, and everything in it ! As if—well, speak again, Toinette.’

‘I think it is both wrong, and sad, too, that in all the village which belongs to us we are not loved. Uncle, tell me, is, then, my father kind to his poor ? Is he generous ? Is he just ?’

‘Kind to his poor ! Just ! Generous !’ said the Abbé, lifting up his hands and raising his eyebrows. ‘He is a just man, Toinette, your father, *and* generous, *and* honest, *and* a great noble. You have no

business—you must not ask—you must not be curious. Besides, I know nothing absolutely.'

'Then why are we not loved, uncle, if we do not oppress and are just?'

'These are questions, my child, on which—that is, which philosophers are by no means agreed in answering. I have myself no distinct theory on the subject. Your father is a great lord, as you well understand; and his fathers were great lords before him. He has horses and people on his estates. These must both work, and both are fed. Your father serves his King and his country in affaires, which keeps him in Paris. He deposes others to manage his private affairs for him. More than that, they manage well. There have been hard years; but the gabelle is gathered, the rents are paid, all taxes covered—everything like clock-work. Grimeau looks after the machinery, and winds the clock. Laurent, the notary, sees that the hands point to

time. If a bad servant, or a disobedient thief of a man, who won't work, Toinette, has to be made to work, well, then, it *is* his work, and—and—he must be made to do it. There, now, eat a few of these bonbons, and do not cry. Forget all this. For me, I am going back to my books.'

'But, again, my Toinette,' he said, as they slowly walked towards the house, 'you are after all, and in truth, but a child. And how should you understand? We are not like your English. We are in a country where all is different, and we are differently governed. If, I say, all the men who malingers, and will not work, are to be fostered; and if those who oversee them in the name of us, the seigneurs, are made to bite the dust before them, the land will soon be in flames. I say nothing; I see a great falling-off in duty, in quality of service, in many things, true. But I can do no good, also I have done no harm. I live in my books, and work at my translations.

As the late King said, “Après moi le déluge.” It has not come yet. But I sometimes think it will. I have heard sounds that have suggested to me that the waters may be gathering. Saint Denis! What a flood it will be! Ma foi! But I shall sleep; and the waters will not drown, or the noise awake me!

The Abbé smiled comfortably as he spoke. He forgot to think, or at all events to say :

‘And you, Toinette? What of you when we sleep and the waters rise? You, at least, will hear them. And what of the end?’

This incident and this conversation had only the effect of troubling Antoinette and bewildering her.

The Abbé was her uncle. He was a high-born gentleman. He was learned; he knew many things. He was kind—in a way. He was not unamiable; but either he really knew nothing of what was going

on every day, or he understood a great deal, and he talked in this manner to amuse and put her off. Either way, he was not sympathetic; and she returned to her own room very sad.

She sat down in a chair near the window, which overlooked the terraced gardens and the richly-shaded park, and the great Bois-fontaine woods beyond. The whole air was full of the hum and stir of spring—its sweet scents, and the music of the happy singing of birds.

Her thoughts flew to Leigh. And as she thought, a longing came over her to be there, to have Geoffrey to unburthen her mind to; to tell this tale of wrong and oppression to those whose warm hearts and ripe judgment would have sympathized, and could have counselled her.

‘Was Grimeau not a bad man, then? Her uncle had defended him. Was he only doing his duty by her father? Was it really that the poor were lazy in France,

and worthless, and must be driven to work ?’


But, though she was at first perplexed, Toinette’s clear mind soon righted itself.

‘Lazy they may be ; but they shall not be beaten like dogs. They are poor, they are ill-fed, they are oppressed and ill-treated, and I will help them.’





CHAPTER XI.

OR a stout, inactive person, with a classical mind which delighted itself only in the lore of ancient countries and among the tombs of dead languages, the Abbé de Vertprés had fallen just now on rather trying times. He had promised to superintend Toinette's studies, and he kept his promise. But Toinette was not a machine ; she was bright and clever ; she had coaxing ways ; and she had ' ideas,' which the Abbé dreaded more than all.

When, for example, the time for study was past, and the mid-day meal over, and the Abbé felt within himself symptoms of

a disposition to sleep stealing over him, or that he must absolutely write in his diary, or return to his dear translation, Toinette had designs upon him, and would beg of him to go with her into the fruit-garden, or into the great orchard, or round the shrubbery that fenced the park, and would inveigle him into conversing on some of the many learned topics in which he was so well versed, and not unwilling to discourse. He would talk, in fact, and with fluency and humour, on anything but the well-being of the people or the management of the estate ; into discussions upon which he never would be drawn, and invariably professed to know nothing, and to have no opinions.

One day Toinette lured him thus out of doors, and persuaded him to go with her down an unfrequented yew-bordered walk, which she had not as yet explored, since in one direction it abutted on the highroad, where she was forbidden to go often, or

alone. This walk had terrace steps at intervals which led from the end of the grand terrace before the Château to a square grass-plot, where stood an ancient sundial. Opposite to the sundial, on the farther side, was a rustic arbour, where the Abbé might safely be deposited with his dear Catullus and his gold-rimmed spectacles; and here, on this particular day, she left him, and wandered about here and there, enjoying herself after the fashion that was growing upon her, in a grave, reflective way, and feeling in every sense the sweet fresh air and the sunshine.

Suddenly she was arrested by a cackling and fluttering noise in the yew hedge, which stretched on either side of a narrow pathway behind and beyond the arbour; and looking about for the cause, she saw a large white hen, frightened at her approach, and tied fast by the leg to a stout yew-stem. It was so tied that it could not escape; at the same time it could use its feet, and

stand, and even scratch ; for it had hollowed out a comfortable basin in the dust, and spent its time in alternately nestling and shuffling there ; and again, as if conscious of its captivity, in struggles and flutterings to get free.

To see anything in trouble was grief to Antoinette. She knelt down on the pathway, and began to loosen the firm and ingenious knot that held together the strips of rag with which it was tied. She had nearly succeeded in setting one leg free, half choked, meantime, by the dust which the struggles of the bird raised in clouds about her, when she heard a frightened voice on the other side of the hedge saying :

‘ Mademoiselle ! oh, mademoiselle ! For pity, beautiful mademoiselle !’

Looking through the leaves she saw a pair of bright brown eyes, then a head of tangled hair and a pair of childish hands clasped beseechingly. The face was full of entreaty, and the eyes brimming with tears.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Antoinette.

‘But only if mademoiselle will leave the hen, and not take it?’

‘Take it!’ cried Antoinette, springing to her feet. ‘Why, what do you think I should do with it? I am only afraid that it will break its leg. It struggles to free itself. See! Who could be so cruel as to tie it there?’

‘Not cruel, mademoiselle; for, look, from time to time it sleeps.’

And she pointed with her small black fore-finger to the hen, which had again shuffled down in comfort into its dust-hole.

‘Come out from there,’ said Toinette, beckoning to her. ‘There is a gap in the hedge lower down, large enough for you to creep through. Come and speak to me. Surely I have seen you, with your black eyes, before, my child? See, then, I will not hurt you. Why are you afraid? Do I look so fierce or so ugly that you fear

me? Put down your hands from your face, and look at me.'

After a few seconds of hesitation the young girl looked out from her fingers and her tangled hair, through the leaves, and saw Antoinette stretching out her hand and smiling with a radiant smile that lit up her whole face. She could not resist. She moved down a few paces and stood in the gap, half on the pathway, half in the hedge, as if to be able to dart away if there should be cause. She was a thin, elfish child, with an old, shrewd look in her face, and eager, shining eyes. She might have been any age, but was, in reality, about Toinette's own.

'Why,' said Toinette, 'you are the girl whom I met in the village. I thought I knew you. You were so afraid of me that day that you ran away indoors, and did not stay to speak.'

'And to whom mademoiselle gave bonbons,' said the girl, as if that incident could not be forgotten.

‘Very well. Now I have more of those in my pocket. At least—no—I have eaten them all. But I will give you some—only tell me about the poor bird. Did you, then, tie it there?’

‘I did. If mademoiselle will but have the goodness to pardon me,’ said the child, and again tears came into her eyes, and a distressed, frightened look to her face.

‘But why?’

‘Monsieur le Surintendant will find it. My brother is in disgrace; he draws water; we cannot this time pay the gabelle. My mother would die; we have nothing: so I hid the pullet; it is our very own, but it is the last. Dorine told me that no one would find it here, and so——’

‘Dorine! my femme de chambre? Do you know her?’

‘Ah, yes, mademoiselle! But do not, I beseech you, do not tell her. She might—she might——’

Here the child burst into tears.

‘Hush, hush!’ said Toinette soothingly. ‘I tell nothing. But I will be good to you, and kind to you, if you will answer me. Why should Grimeau take away the hen if it is yours?’

‘Ah, mademoiselle, we must pay. But we cannot. My mother, too, is dying. Last week we killed one—at least, not a hen, but a rabbit; it might have been once the seigneur’s, but it was caught in our fence—I myself, in fact, I caught it. I then put it in the pot-au-feu. We were all three starving hungry; my mother said it would bring her to life again. But the door was open; Maître Grimeau, he was passing by. He saw me cooking. He said that my brother was a pig, and that we should not eat if we would not pay the gabelle. He took the lid off, and—and——’

The weeping child looked up through her tears, as if to see whether she might dare to go on with this dismal tale. Toinette

nodded ; she could not speak, and her eyes, too, were full of tears.

‘ He took away the rabbit. I said, “ Give it back this once, monsieur ; my mother will die ! We have nothing ! ” He then boxed my ears, and said, “ Then she had better die, coche ; there will be one less to cook for ; ” and he went away. We had no bread, we had nothing, but we hungered ! That, mademoiselle, is why I have hidden the white fowl, which I myself reared, until Maitre Grimeau shall have gone to his auberge in Malette, so that he will not pass our door again. For if my mother could but eat, she would live ! ’

This terrible story filled Toinette with horror. She could not think. She could do nothing but feel. She caught the girl in her impulsive arms, and, to her surprise and terror, kissed her then and there. The child was turning to run away, when she caught her by the hand, and said :

‘ Now, pauvrete, come with me. If you

run away I shall be grieved. I want to do you good, and I will give you bon-bons. Come !'

She turned, followed tremblingly by the girl, in a kind of dazed obedience. As they entered the place where the arbour stood, facing the old sun-dial, they came suddenly upon a sight which filled the child with such fear that she fell on her knees upon the ground, and gave a suppressed cry. There, upon the chair, in the middle of the arbour, sat the Abbé. His laced-hat, which he had pulled over his eyes, had slipped a trifle on one side. His rosy shining face was still rosier from the air and sunshine. His spectacles had moved a little forward over his nose ; one white hand was comfortably tucked into the cincture of his soutane ; the other hung listless, as if Catullus had dragged it downward in his own descent to the ground, where he lay prone. The sweet airs and sounds of spring had lulled the Abbé into a doze

so pleasant that a benevolent and pleasing smile was making merry over his sleeping face.

The young girl's cry awoke him with a start. He became very upright ; and the smile vanished from his countenance, and was replaced by a startled and bewildered look. An expression escaped him more irritable than became a philosopher.

‘ Uncle,’ said Antoinette, ‘ I do so much want your bonbonnière.’

‘ You do ! What now, Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine ! What new freak is this ?’ pointing with one hand to the child, but amiably yielding the chocolate-box with the other. His hat still stood tilted on one side, on the top of his powdered hair, and the smile returned cautiously to his face, as he now became thoroughly awake.

Then Antoinette, having filled the shrinking hand with sweets, burst out in all the warmth of her feeling. The starving children ! the unpaid tax ! the cruel, cruel surin-

tendant ! the dying mother ! But the Abbé could not stand all this.

‘Take her away,’ he said. ‘Here is a five-franc piece. You will ruin me, Toinette, besides inflicting upon me disease of the heart. Send her away ! I have no more ; go, go, child !’

‘Adieu, poor little one !’ said Toinette. ‘Buy something for your mother with this money. Leave there the white pullet. I will say nothing. No one will touch it. Adieu.’

‘Toinette, Toinette !’ called the Abbé, moving away ; and again, angrily, ‘Toinette ! Par bleu ! the child is mad—mad !’

‘Now,’ said the Abbé, whose round form was not built for speed, nor by habit educated thereto—‘now, Toinette, I am a philosopher ; but—but—all the same, Toinette, I am angry. You—you bring me out here, away from my books, and—and my business, which is before all things calm, peaceful, absorbing ! You lead me away from all

this ! You betray me into an ambuscade ! You deceive me, ungrateful child ! You make me hot—and—and—ill ! And you wear me out. Now,' said the Abbé, striking his ebony cane upon the gravel pathway, 'understand, I can't—I won't. I shall die of this sort of thing, and I will not do it !'

'Oh, uncle !' said Toinette, 'pardon ; I never meant to trouble you. I found the child. She was so miserable, so hungry, so poor——'


'Well, well,' said the Abbé, relaxing perceptibly, 'no more, no more. I pardon thee, Toinette. But, remember, you are a child ; you understand nothing—how can you ? And I say to you, how can you, with your finger, roll away a stone which is covered with the moss and lichen of ages ? and which, if it should be rolled away from its place, will crush you, ay, you and yours, my little one. If things pain you, why look that way ? If you hear discordant sounds, why listen ? If things are going

wrong, be sure that *you* cannot put them right. Be blind, then ; be deaf ; be content. Let what is alone. For me, I know nothing, and I am older than you. I can change nothing, if I would ; so I retire. I study. I write. I find in my books theories more brilliant than any living facts, and I prefer the theories. Go you, then, to your tambour frame. But we are friends, my Toinette. I forgive you—I.'





CHAPTER XII.

T was thus made clear to Toinette that, until she was old enough to discuss theories with him, she must not look for much conversation with the Abbé on other topics. But her mind was in a ferment, and as yet she had not learned that power of self-control which she was so greatly to need. She glanced around her, mentally, with a craving for relief. Her mother was in Paris; yet, were she here, Toinette instinctively knew that to her least of all could she turn in such a case. The Marquis, her father, was also in Paris; and the awe she had of him told her

that, except under great excitement or pressure, she would not have dared, as things were, to ask him any questions. There was Armand. He was, she knew, coming to Boisfontaine in a day or two. Oh, had he been like Geoffrey Leigh, with what joy—with what thankfulness would she have looked for his coming ! But he was incomprehensible, he was overbearing, he was wholly unsympathetic in every way ; and she turned from the very idea with pain.

So, when she and the Abbé parted in the great hall, she went heavily up the wide oak staircase, dangling her hood by its ribands, and drooping her head with a sad, overladen feeling, very unlike her usual brightness. She seemed to herself to be growing quite old.

As she reached her own apartment, and threw herself wearily on a sort of low couch near the open window, Dorine, her maid, came in. Dorine was a silent, dark-haired woman : an excellent servant, but neither

talkative herself nor encouraging to be talked to. Antoinette accepted her services as a matter of course; and, much as she would have liked to question her about things and people at Boisfontaine, an indefinable something repelled and kept her silent, so that she rarely spoke to Dorine. Many a time did she wish for prim but devoted Mrs. Peters; or even Betty, the still-room maid, who ran after Miss Wilkins, and who so delighted to be allowed to serve Toinette in the home at Leigh. However, on this occasion Dorine must have thought that her young mistress was unusually grave or pale, for she said :

‘Mademoiselle has the headache? or is tired, or ennuyée?’

‘Not tired, Dorine,’ she said gently.

Then, all at once starting from her chair, as if impelled to unburthen herself to some one, she said :

‘Dorine, you must know—you can tell me—you have seen——’

Suddenly she remembered the child's entreaty, '*Do not tell Dorine*,' and she stopped short. Lifting her eyes, she saw Dorine standing behind the chair she had risen from, her face and forehead dyed crimson, her eyes cast down, and a forbidding expression upon her face. As quickly the heavy, dark blush faded out, and left the usual sallow tint in its place. Then Dorine looked up furtively, as if waiting for what was to follow upon this outburst. It was now Antoinette's turn to feel confused, and that she had made a mistake ; so, with a gracious way she had — perhaps hereditary, at all events charming—she put her hand upon Dorine's folded hands, and said :

'It is nothing, Dorine—nothing. But fetch me some eau sucrée, for I am indeed thirsty, and—and—ennuyée.'

Dorine made no reply. But it was not until afterwards that Toinette recalled how, when she had laid the tips of her fingers upon Dorine's brown hands, Dorine had

started from the touch, and how the sullen red had glowed in her face again ; for she herself was thinking of how nearly she had forgotten her promise to the owner of the white pullet.

A few days after this, Armand arrived. He came in the late evening, just as Toinette and her uncle were about to wind up a game at tric-trac, and repair to the adjoining *salle* for supper. There was a dashing and tramping of horses' feet, a sound of voices in the *porte cochère*, together with a good deal of bustle and noise, interspersed with *sac-r-r-r-és* and other like ornaments.

‘Ha ! there is *Monsieur le Vicomte* !’ said the Abbé, rosy and smiling over the game he had just won.

So he and Toinette went out into the hall. She saw Armand descending from his whisky, with his hand on the shoulder of his valet, looking the picture of an ineffable fop. He carried a muff of Russian sables, and appeared to find the evening air

very chill, though it was the middle of May ; for he wore a loose cloak lined with furs, and he brought with him the perfume of essences and scented hair-powder.

Armand was then about two-and-twenty, and would have been thought handsome but for his diminutive figure, and the mincing, affected manners which were no doubt the extreme of fashion. And then Monsieur de Salis never showed to advantage at Bois-fontaine, however charming he might appear in his own coterie. To-day, however, he arrived in a pleasanter humour than usual, saluted his uncle with a certain urbane propriety which he knew how to assume on occasion, and spoke to Toinette without laughing at her. He would not, however, enter the *salle-à-manger* with them, but ordered chocolate to be served in his own apartment, whither he at once retired.

‘ Armand looks quite pleasant this time, uncle ; I hope he will remain so all the time of his visit,’ said Antoinette naïvely.

‘Armand is one of Fortune’s children,’ said the Abbé, regarding Toinette with an amused, twinkling smile at her outspoken ways. ‘We can all look gay when our cake is cut to our liking ; is it not so ? Armand is now an officer in the Queen’s own Guard. Your father, then, is he not a fortunate man ? He has one son, whose present is supplied by money for which he need not work too much ; his future, also, is provided for : he will be Marquis de Boisfontaine, with its woods, its game, its droits de chasse, its seignorial rights, its people, its creatures, its privileges of every kind.’

‘Then,’ said Antoinette, with a deep and grave sigh, ‘I hope that the good God will make Armand different by that time. I think he cares for his toilette more than his possessions, and himself more than all.’

‘But you have a naughty tongue, Toinette,’ said the Abbé. ‘You should not say what you think. You must remember that you will have to go to Court. At Court,

Toinette, they do not embrace dirty children, scold surintendants, reflect upon their brothers, and, in short, destroy the peace of mind of their philosophers and teachers, and uproot the classical habits of their uncles ; eh, little marmot ?

The Abbé's round blue eyes were lost in twinkles as he said this. He chuckled comfortably, and then looked out from under his shaggy eyebrows, and over the rims of his spectacles in a way so comical, that Antoinette laughed too. She knew by this time how all subjects, deep or shallow, slipped easily off the Abbé's good-natured insouciance. He was so irritable and so pettish, yet so easily appeased, and never could resist a smile or a bon mot. Whether he ever was in earnest, or thought in earnest, she could not make out ; whether he was easy in his mind, and did not care what happened outside himself ; or whether he knew a great deal, and saw below the surface of things which he would not discuss, she

did not know ; or whether he thought her too young to talk with, or had nothing to talk about that she could appreciate. What engrossed, and troubled, and weighed upon her was that there were things going on around her in the living world of human beings, of interest far keener, and import more strange, than any book or book-lore could supply. Her ear instinctively caught the sound of that deep warning note which was rising to the heavens from the oppressed earth—the key-note of a terrible dirge.





CHAPTER XIII.



ONE day, not long after this, Antoinette, drawn as by a magnet to the place of durance of the white pullet, and saying to herself that so long as she kept within the precincts, and did not trouble the Abbé, she was neither doing wrong herself nor wronging anyone—Toinette, I say, found herself loitering slowly down the yew-hedge walk in the direction of the sun-dial and the arbour, meditating, after her fashion. As she approached the back of the arbour she heard voices ; one certainly was Armand's, the other a woman's voice, low, harsh, and rapid. What

could be the matter ! Could the pullet be struggling there still, uneaten, uncooked ? and had Armand found it ? and was he blazing out in wrath upon the unhappy and terrified owner ! — perhaps even letting Grimeau loose upon that wretched household ? Antoinette was in a fever ; she quickened her pace : the high-heeled shoes she wore were loose, and tapped noisily upon the gravel ; and when she turned into the little arbour where the Abbé had gone to sleep and been so galvanized into awakening, she was almost startled to find Armand sitting there, quite alone.

‘ Well, Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine,’ said her brother, lifting his laced hat and rising to make her a profound bow, ‘ to what accident do I, then, owe this pleasure ? Your femmes de chambre or your gouvernante are, doubtless, in attendance ? or you have outrun Monsieur l’Abbé ? — at which I am not surprised, considering his figure. Otherwise, mademoiselle my sister would

not be here, so far from the Château, and alone ?’

At first his extreme and pointed politeness made Toinette blush all over, as if caught in a fault. But she soon rallied her wits, and looking him straight in the face, said :

‘ But why not ? I never go beyond the grounds. I do like the fresh air and the sunshine. In England I used to be out of doors so much.’

‘ In England ! Ah, England is a paradise, where angels live—according to mademoiselle’s idea of angels,’ sneered Armand ; ‘ but in this wicked France the customs of angels are obsolete, and, without doubt, unsuitable.’

Armand intended this to be satirical and cutting, but Toinette thought it simply rude. She was angry ; and said foolishly, but having no idea of the offence she was giving :

‘ I am within the demesne which is my father’s. I am safe here, and I never go

beyond. I am sorry I interrupted your—your conversation, but I did not expect to find you here.’

The effect on Armand was electrical. He started to his feet, seized his gold-headed cane, and raised it aloft ; his eyes blazed with anger, and his whole small person vibrated with passion. Advancing one foot at every word, and seeming almost as if about to strike her :

‘ So, mademoiselle, you—you are to spy on me ; you, who are so English—you——’

Rage had so completely obliterated the elegant manners of Monsieur le Vicomte, and obscured his speech, that Antoinette knew not whether to laugh or cry. He was so comical in his full-dress, his powder, his rings, and his laces, and shaking all over with the sudden wrath he was so inadequate to render imposing. At last, being bankrupt in respect of words, he burst into a string of the oaths much affected by the youth of that day, and highly fashionable, the familiar

jingle of which recalled him to his accustomed self. He laughed in a hateful and sneering kind of way, and, again raising his hat, said :

‘Another time mademoiselle will leave me to my own meditations, and keep to her flower-garden and her tambour-frame, leaving these sequestered walks to—to—in short to themselves. For me, I prefer solitude. Adieu.’

‘Another time I will not interrupt you, monsieur my brother, when I hear you conversing aloud with the Genius of Solitude,’ said naughty Toinette, unable to resist this parting shaft, but not waiting to see the effect of it, as she fled away to the Château at the top of her speed. And when next she met Armand he made no allusion of any sort to the foregoing scene.

But yet once more, before he left Bois-fontaine, was Toinette destined to be his trial, and fall into Armand’s way uncomfortably for both parties. She had been

afraid of going into the court-yard in search of Sancho ever since the memorable afternoon when she had seen Maitre Grimeau beating the fallen man. But somehow to-day she felt a desire to take Sancho out upon the green grass, and let him have an hour of delicious freedom. Instead, however, of venturing round by the archway and the walnut-tree, she went through the great hall down a stone corridor, which led from the body of the mansion, through one of the wings, to a little side-door opening on the quadrangle, and generally used by the servants only. A large window faced the court, and was partly open. Before this window she paused—voices she knew were audible. They were the voices of Armand and of Maître Grimeau; both were raised, and speaking apparently with suppressed excitement.

‘It is of no use making excuses. That money I must have; and I return to Paris three days hence.’

Grimeau was resisting and excusing himself, Armand insisting. And the burthen of it all was—money. At last Grimeau appeared to be yielding. Antoinette finally heard him say :

‘Monsieur, then, since he insists, shall have the money ; but it will be the third time within eight months, and even I—I shall, without doubt, fail another time. These people are pigs and asses, truly. But even pigs must live, and asses must be fed. Look at these——’

As he spoke, a rumbling noise was heard underneath the archway—the slow creaking of wheels, the lurching of a heavy vehicle, and the groans of human beings. Then came into the court-yard, slowly, painfully, stooping forward against their harness, five men, yoked to a water-cart, which they had just dragged uphill from the river.

‘The sixth,’ said Grimeau, pointing in their direction with a heavy-handled riding-whip which he carried, ‘is not available.’

‘How not available? Dead?’

‘But no,’ said the superintendent, with a frown. ‘Lame, as well as obstinate, and altogether imbecile; like, in short, these others. Behold them!’

Armand did for a moment regard these toiling men, whose scowling and furtive glances he altogether mistook, believing them to be looks of curious admiration of himself, suitably mixed with awe. He beheld them from his point of view with a supercilious air of disgust at their appearance, and dislike of their immediate neighbourhood to his delicate, refined, and richly-dressed person. He then took snuff from his enamelled box, and, turning suddenly, hurried indoors, and that with such abrupt haste that he, as it were, fell upon Toinette, who, intensely absorbed, stood looking out into the court-yard at the degraded beings before her.

‘Mademoiselle! Antoinette! what are you doing here? Prying into things which

do not concern you again ? Are these your English manners, then ?

But Antoinette, at least, was in no degree awed, either by his splendour of dress, or his sarcastic manner, or his words ; and she turned round upon him, full of her own thoughts.

‘ Armand,’ she said, in a passionate voice, wherein tears were hovering, ‘ look—look at these men ! Is not Grimeau wicked to have it so ? Will you not speak to him now that you see for yourself his cruelty ? Tell him he shall not drive those men as if they were cattle. They are human beings ! flesh and blood, like us, Armand !’

‘ Like us ! Pah !’ said her brother, shrugging his shoulders ; ‘ saints and diables forbid it !’

‘ But they feel—they suffer—they——’

‘ Feel ! Do they feel ? do they live like us, then ?’

‘ Grimeau is very hard to them. He beats them. He terribly oppresses them !’

‘They deserve it. Besides, he is not a bad fellow, Grimeau. He is an obliging drôle ; I cannot have him abused. Come along, ma chère ; this is no place for you ; and he does not beat anyone.’

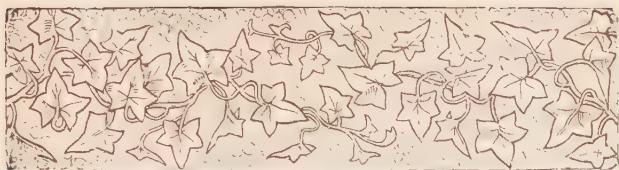
‘I saw him, Armand. The poor man was lame ; he fell down, and Grimeau beat him there’—and she caught him by the sleeve and pointed outside—‘there, upon the very spot where those others are now ! I said I should tell my father. And if you will not speak to Grimeau, I will tell him all.’

At this amusing idea, Armand laughed aloud.

‘Ah, Toinette, but you are droll ; you are foolish ; you are, in short—English ! For me, I know well that these imbeciles are yoked by the very order of Monsieur le Marquis. And very merciful it is of him so to order. And why ? They stole his game ! There ! Only you know nothing of the droits de chasse, or any other droits ;

how should you, little raton that you are? Those men' (waving his hand towards the window) 'ate his hares, and other creatures—*ate* them! The wretches! for whom hay and grass are good enough, they being pigs and asses! They were sentenced by the law to the galleys. My father told Grimeau to give them a choice. They made their choice. There; now let the estate, and the servants, and the laws of France alone. You are a child. What do you know? Go to your dolls and your embroidery.'

Then Armand laughed in his provoking way; and, raising his hat with a grace peculiar to himself, walked off, leaving her to follow—humbly and sadly, perhaps, but by no means quelled in spirit, as Armand, in his superior way, believed.



CHAPTER XIV.

NEVERTHELESS, all these things sank deeply into her mind ; and Antoinette felt as if the girl who had lived at Leigh with that charming home-circle, and with Geoffrey for a confidant, was altogether a different identity to herself, who was always alone in this vast and beautiful domain—so beautiful outwardly, and so grand ; where, she also began to realize, there was so much misery and evil, of which she alone seemed conscious. Here, visible to her eyes, was the time-honoured Château, the fitting abode of a great noble ; the lovely gardens, and the

far-stretching fields and woods—all the inheritance of a long line, rich and powerful. No one could behold and not admire this great inheritance, or could say that its present owner was unworthy of it. But underlying all were great griefs, wrongs, injustice—nay, oppression; and these wrought in her father's name, and perhaps with his cognizance. Besides what she knew of, and had seen, there was, to Antoinette's fine organization, a consciousness that there was something present, something in the very air, no more tangible or visible than a shadowy, unrevealed spectre, but which was evil, and therefore antagonistic—opposed to her pure, sweet nature. There was mystery everywhere. She became more and more conscious that things were going on around her that she could not grasp or understand. To come to her immediate entourage, Dorine, her servant, was antipathetic; and Toinette, who at first would have been so glad to talk and chatter at her toilette, became grave

and silent. She had not forgotten the start of repulsion with which Dorine had thrown off her fingers that day, not so long ago. She was sure that it had been repulsion. She began to have Dorine on her mind : so little was there of a healthy nature to occupy it just now. She again very nearly disturbed Armand in one of her wanderings in a secluded part of the grounds (she had never since that day been near the sun-dial). Once more she heard voices amongst the tall, thick shrubs, one of which was Armand's — she knew his light, flippant laugh so well now—and the other she became convinced was the voice of her waiting-maid, Dorine. She had liked the girl's manner, too, less and less. Of this she was so conscious, that she began to take herself to task, and wonder if she was harsh to Dorine, or exacting. But no ; she felt clear on this point. And as to being exacting, Dorine was so efficient as a servant, that Toinette found fault only with

the minuteness of her service, not with the lack of it. She felt checked at every turn.

Antoinette often thought of the elfish child and her pullet, wondering if she had safely evaded the Argus eyes of Grimeau's avarice, and if the poor mother had eaten and lived. But so long as Armand remained she did not dare to go down the yew-walk. As to the Abbé, he was as good-natured as ever ; but like a highly-polished stone, from which all appeals and questionings glanced off, leaving no mark, and making no impression.

Between the Abbé and his nephew there was some difference, or some coolness, she thought. But they seldom met, even at meals ; for Monsieur de Salis called their hours rustic, and kept his own.

One day she happened to enter the salon just as Armand, looking very irate, was leaving it, and she heard him say :

‘ Let the world wag, Monsieur l’Abbé. You, too, were young once.’

And the Abbé, looking, for him, quite grave and solemn, answered :

‘Aye, the world has wagged—with bonhomie, and at its pleasure—since before I was young, Armand, my nephew. For my part, I think that in these days it begins to *shake*, which is another thing. It may, for example, shake us to the ground, where we shall bite the dust while some of us are still young. Ah, my jewel, it is you ! The dinner is served ; let us country folk eat, then. But first give me my little volume. Monsieur le Vicomte and I have talked philosophy until I feel myself with an appetite. He is a fine gentleman, and heir to Boisfontaine ; nevertheless, he is somewhat of an imbecile.’

Saying which, the Abbé shrugged his shoulders ; and, not without a little effort, resumed his habitual complacency. He succeeded, however, and talked to Toinette during dinner with considerable vivacity upon the history of ancient Greece.



CHAPTER XV.



AFTER the departure of Armand, things became more peaceful and somewhat less strained.

Antoinette took an early opportunity, as may be imagined, of going down the walk by the yew-hedge. In her unoccupied life, so empty of the sympathy she had been accustomed to, or of any lawful object whereon to lavish her energy or her affection, the incidents that had befallen her had all the charm of adventure to her imagination. And, true to its prestige, the yew-hedge walk had yet another incident, another mystery to offer her.

Before she could reach the spot where the white pullet had been tied, and close to the arbour where she had so disconcerted her brother by appearing before him suddenly, she heard the voice of weeping ; and she flew with a beating heart to find the cause. Then she beheld, seated on the ground in a paroxysm of tears, the owner of the white hen, so absorbed in her grief that she did not hear Toinette's light footstep on the path. A look of abject terror and misery came over her as Toinette touched her shoulder and asked what had happened, thinking that, at least, the poor starved mother must have died. It was long before she could pacify the girl, who shook from head to foot with a sort of hysterical passion of tears, fright, and probably hunger. Antoinette's sympathy divined this latter ; and, before she questioned her, she brought out of the deep pocket under her gown a slice of cake, which she had brought out to enjoy under the trees,

together with 'Emile,' which had been sent down from Paris for her entertainment.

As she watched the hungry young creature devouring it, she wished it had been twice as large.

'Now, little one,' she said, as the last morsel disappeared, 'tell me why you weep. You need not look round ; no one is here. Monsieur my uncle, whom you saw before, is to-day within doors. I am alone. Speak.'

A curious look, an old, anxious, questioning look, crossed the girl's face as she fixed her eyes on Toinette's, so sweet and grave, waiting for her reply. A moment passed ; and then, melting by degrees, as if satisfied and at rest, a pathetic, trusting expression took its place. She seized Antoinette's hand in her brown and not too clean ones, and kissed it again and again, saying :

'I love mademoiselle ! I would die for mademoiselle ! I will work for mademoiselle !'

‘ And your mother ? and the white pullet—where is it ?’

‘ We feasted ; we were rich ! My mother, she ate of it ; and, as she said, she recovered. It was hunger, mademoiselle ! it was that only ! We could pay the tax to Maitre Grimeau with the silver piece, and some little that my mother had saved.’

‘ But,’ said Antoinette, ‘ I gave you that money to buy food with—not to pay taxes.’

‘ Mademoiselle does not quite see. The tax was our trouble just then. And we could not have dared to buy with the large silver piece. They would have said we stole, or that we hid our money. Maître Grimeau says already that we hide. He says, too, that Joseph, my brother, shall at least go to the galleys, if he does not get him hung, because he is now lame, and cannot work.’

‘ What ?’ said Toinette, ‘ is it your brother — is he, then, that poor man who——’

‘Yes; one of those six whom Monsieur le Marquis ordered to be forgiven if they would draw water for the Château and the gardens.’

Antoinette groaned. ‘Forgiven!’ she thought; ‘but what forgiveness!’ And the whole scene in the court-yard, to her so sad and so terrible, passed before her excited mind.

‘What had they—your brother, what had he done, then?’

The girl looked up with her bright eyes of scrutiny to Toinette’s face, as if to see whether even her good-will would survive the shock of such a revelation of crime, and then said:

‘He was wrong, mademoiselle, and I also say that he was never quite like us’—she pointed to her forehead—‘so he could not be taught, not even any trade. And he had twice been taken for the *corvée* away from home, where he went with a gang—and he was with bad men and boys who made him

wild and savage. For me, I know it was wrong ; but it was that he snared some of Monsieur le Marquis's game ! They feed close to our very doors—they eat everything we call our own. But we may not kill—we may not touch them. Maître Grimeau suspected, and watched, and caught Joseph, who is not clever. He was not alone. The sons of Duclôt, the blacksmith—more especially Jacques (they are altogether bad, and the worst in the whole village)—they were there ; and they drove Joseph before them with the bag. Maître Grimeau knew it. But he let Jacques go free ; for his father is not poor, like us, and he paid. But Joseph carried the dead game ; yet he was no worse than they were. We know he was wrong. My mother is poor, and she works hard and keeps us somehow. But she is good ; Monsieur le Curé says she is good, and *he* knows (we should, but for him, have died) ; and she weeps for Joseph's sins ! And now that he lies groaning and

lame, and in terror of punishment, my mother slaves for him and prays for him.'

'And you say that you could not spend any of that silver piece on the poor mother? How, then, did you contrive to——'

'Dorine, mademoiselle!' cried the young girl, brightening visibly. 'Dorine is so good to us. She has money. She gave us sous in exchange, and I gave to her the silver piece. It is she who has helped us often—often.'

'Well,' said Toinette, 'I have now in my pocket two silver pieces, for which I have no use; and I will give them to you, if you will vow to take them to your mother, and to tell no one else about it.'

Tears stood in the girl's eyes.

'Mademoiselle is good as an angel. But—I did not ask for money.'

'Nevertheless, I give it. And is this all for which you cried, but now?'

'It was at the parting—to part with Dorine, my sister.'

‘With Dorine? But why? You will see her again to-morrow, next day, every day?’

‘No, mademoiselle, or I should not be here. She forbade me to speak to mademoiselle, or to show myself here at all, on any excuse. She will not return to us again, now. But she will send us money—money to help my mother, and to keep Joseph in sickness.’

‘How, then?’ cried Toinette in astonishment. ‘Where, then, has she gone? She is in my service; to me she said nothing! Dorine is my chambermaid, my servant; I must indeed talk to her.’

‘But it is at mademoiselle’s orders. It is mademoiselle who sends her!’

‘I who send her! Where?’

‘To Paris, mademoiselle! Is it not so?’

‘To Paris? Little one, either you, or I, or both of us are dreaming! This morning Dorine dressed my hair, assisted at my toilette, received my orders. She will again

serve me and attend my coucher. She is without doubt occupied with my affairs now—at this moment !’

Silence fell upon the two. A shrewd, sharp look came into the face of the girl, as if she thought that Antoinette must in reality be mixed up in this mystery ; and that, after the manner of great ladies, she was telling her own version of the truth. But she soon read Toinette’s clear eyes more truly.

‘Then Dorine has told us lies,’ she said ; ‘but without doubt it was to calm my mother.’

‘What did she tell you ? and why did she then speak of me ?’ asked Toinette, feeling that a wrong had been done to herself in mixing her name with this affair.

‘She said that mademoiselle had ordered her to leave Boisfontaine for the service of Madame la Marquise, at Versailles ; that madame will keep her entirely about herself and give her larger wages ; that made-

moiselle had hastened her, and ordered her to go to-day, when Maître Grimeau goes to Issy.'

'So when I return to the Château, Dorine will have already gone to Paris! and who then will wait upon me? Who will this night attend me, or to-morrow?'

'Of that I know not; mademoiselle will know. For me, I must return. I came here to weep: and now I have seen mademoiselle, and talked—perhaps too much.'

Antoinette did not answer either the words or the look of appeal. Her pride was touched. She was stung—as we should say, nettled. She had made the girl talk, and her talk had betrayed so many painful things, that she wanted to be alone, and to think them out. That feeling of being in an atmosphere which was oppressive and unhealthy came upon her with redoubled force. She felt like a short-sighted person trying to peer into the distance, and unable to gauge it, or the dangers which she

knew were lurking there, beyond her ken. A voiceless prayer rose in her mind. 'I am alone,' she thought; 'may the good God lead me!' The Abbé's philosophy seemed so insufficient. 'Be calm; we know nothing. Let everything alone. Let events range themselves.' Antoinette was beginning to know too much to remain capable of being calm.

Moreover, she had, this little Toinette, notwithstanding her simplicity, certain instincts of birthright, and of her own place in the world. Had Dorine, her *femme de chambre*, been ill, or in trouble, or wanted help, she would have given her all that was in her power. But she was not ill; she had told lies—had left her service without warning or scruple; therefore *Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine* was angry, and considered herself wronged. She wandered slowly back towards the Château, chafing under the idea of her incapacity to cope with the surroundings amidst which she found herself.

And yet with her vexation there came presently a sense almost of relief. Dorine, to her frank pure nature, was a mystery; there was about the girl a something repellent—a something of which, had Antoinette been in any way timid, she would have been afraid—a something dark and incomprehensible. She felt tired, as if she carried heavy weights—weights above her strength, and there was no one to help her. She suddenly remembered that the Abbé would be waiting for her. The sun had set, and she must go indoors. As she entered the vestibule, he was looking for her, and wondering at her absence.

‘Ah, little marmoset; so you are come! It is on the hour, as you see;’ and he pointed to the ponderous old clock which stood opposite. ‘Let us go.’

So together they went into the dining-room, where the supper was already served. Antoinette had for some days past been ailing. She was tired, sad, and perplexed

this evening ; and the Abbé rallied her on her pale cheeks, insisting that she should mix some of the light wine, which he himself took, with the water in her glass. Any little kindness easily touched Antoinette, and there were tears in her eyes ; she did feel so alone, so troubled, so mystified, and so friendless. But Toinette was changed. She was beginning to learn that hard lesson of self-control which she was to find so invaluable to her in the events that were to come. Once she would have opened out her griefs and asked a thousand questions. But not now. Servants were in the room ; and when they left it, still she was silent. The Abbé, she was learning to understand, was about the last person to ask questions of ; and she knew he did not approve of her wandering about in the grounds and gardens, and would have had a lecture ready cut and dried for the occasion. In point of fact, he had so far actively disapproved of her being so much alone, that, feeling himself inade-

quate to the occasion, he had written to the Marquise on the subject confidentially. But this he kept to himself. Toinette therefore drew round her, so to speak, a little cloak of silence, and felt that she must be growing old, and learning to know the troubles of life before she had tasted any of its boasted joys.

After supper the Abbé was accustomed to a game of cards. Antoinette, though her head ached, would not say so, but sat with him till the hour for retiring came, and endeavoured to do her part as usual. She succeeded; but the Abbé was not altogether so blind as he professed to be. He did not want to know anything outside his own routine, but he had glimmerings, altogether clear-sighted for a blind man.

‘Thou art a good girl, my Toinette,’ he said, patting her on the shoulder as he wished her good-night. ‘Take, then, the advice of thy uncle, who, though he is old and a bookworm, and has no interests out-

side, has yet a corner of his spectacles open, through which he looks and makes reflections. Let the world, I say, alone, and it will leave thee alone. If I, who am old, know nothing, how canst thou, who art a child, know anything whatever? Now go to bed. Sleep soundly; forget; let thy mind sleep as well as thy body. Both, *mort de ma vie!* will awaken soon enough!

Prophetic words: which, though now they had a sound so hollow, so insufficient for her need, were long remembered by Toinette with every incident of that eventful night.





CHAPTER XVI.



VERY slowly and wearily Antoinette toiled up the great oak staircase ; not at all like a young girl tired out with a day's pleasure or employment, and about to recoup herself with the sweet, soft, natural sleep of youth. She carried a weight at her heart—the weight of the sufferings of the poor, and the sense of evil in the atmosphere. It brought to her, for the first time in her life, fear ; an indescribable dread, whether of danger natural or supernatural she could not tell. She became aware of the silence of the night ; of the size and emptiness of the vast oak-

panelled hall as she crossed it. She began to ascend the stairs, and her footfall seemed to echo as it had never done before, and the stairs to creak, as if they, too, were burthened.

A silver lamp hung down by its chain from the ceiling, in the middle of the landing-place on the top of the staircase, upon which some of the sleeping-apartments opened. Her mother's room, and boudoir, the private room of the Marquis, all the doors of these and other rooms, now closed, looked cold, and dark, and stern. An utterly wretched feeling came over her as she ran, rather than walked, down the corridor to her own room, and closed the door in haste behind her, as if to shut out the eerie vastness of the place. Here again was something to perplex her. She had been prepared for the absence of Dorine, and accordingly Dorine was absent. But the candles on her toilet-table were lit, and everything was arranged in order ; yet no one was there to

attend her. She had been taught in England habits of independence ; she could, and would, have dispensed with personal service if need there had been. But she did not understand why this mystery should be ; and the feeling of loneliness pressed upon her more and more intensely.

Opening into the ruelle, at the head of her own bed, was a door which led into a closet, or small ante-chamber, where Dorine had slept ; and which, again, opened on a staircase leading by a long passage to the servants' offices. Antoinette knew that she must, at all events, go into this room, and secure the door beyond ; yet felt an intense repulsion and unwillingness to enter it. Again and again she took the light in her trembling hand, and listened, with the awe of the night upon her, whether there was any sound within. Once, in a trembling voice, she called ' Dorine ! ' but there was no answer—only silence. At length, ashamed of her weakness, she determined to conquer

it. Again she took up the light, and drawing aside the curtain that hung across it, she lifted the latch of the door and entered. It was quite empty ; scrupulously clean and tidy, as if it had not been inhabited for ages. She felt a sense of relief ; nothing was lurking there, at any rate. She then crossed to the opposite door, which led into the passage—it, too, was closed ; but, to her horror and consternation, she found that the bolt within was broken, and the only fastening was outside.

Antoinette had not undressed herself, and she at once determined that she would not go to bed ; that she would sit up in the high-backed oak chair by the window, which, like everything in that part of the Castle, was old, and dark, and stiff, and not of the kind to tempt its occupant to repose. She closed the door of Dorine's empty chamber, drew the curtains across it, and, drawing the chair into the window—where, at least, there were the stars and the moonlight for com-

pany—she knelt down to pray. Her heart seemed to die within her. She was alone. The air was thronged with shapeless fears. The great building was wrapt in silence. But it was not so much the silence of emptiness that seemed so terrible, as the silence of mystery which hung about it. She could say no words in her prayer ; her lips were dry ; her heart was beating fast and heavily. But, with all the power of her being, she threw herself at the feet of Him who, she knew, could see all that was hidden from her eyes, and keep her in the midst of it. She could hear the dull, heavy tick of the great clock in the hall below ; the hollow sound through the stillness as it struck the hour, then the half-hour, and, at last, midnight. A sad, weird melancholy in the wind sobbed in the key-holes, and waved the dark branches of the cypress-trees near her window, and shook them with a slow, solemn motion, which, to Toinette's eyes, appeared like the nodding of sable plumes. The echoes of the house began to

multiply. The vacant space outside her door weighed upon her, and every blast, as it rose and fell in the corridors, and in the empty chambers beyond, seemed to her disordered imagination like the sighing and weeping of human voices. Her nerves were unstrung ; and she thought she heard a distant rumbling sound as of thunder, or of some heavy vehicle in the courtyard. The whole scene of the degraded human beings whom she had seen there, harnessed like animals, rose before her, and the anger, as well as misery, in their faces. With all her strength she battled against the terror which crept over her as she thought how easy it would be for one of those men, made desperate by suffering, to steal into the Château, and murder anyone whom he found defenceless ! But there was yet another agony. This old building, this Château Boisfontaine, like other old buildings, had its revenant. To fear of the material, succeeded that other of the intangible, and she was in

no state to contend with either. At that moment an owl flew past the window, hooting, and startled her afresh. Antoinette knew the horror which French country-people have of that sound, and the superstition acted upon her, too. Her nerves were now wrought to the highest pitch, and her sense of hearing became an agony. She felt certain that someone had entered Dorine's chamber. A soft, heavy footstep was surely moving there. Yes! A board creaked in the floor—she knew the sound right well. There was a presence there—a something; a someone! An intense longing for protection rose from the depths of her heart. Geoffrey Leigh's bold, open face rose in her mind. But what availed that memory? She was alone, and must meet this alone. The strain was becoming too acute; she had no power to move. She knew that the door of Dorine's room was being slowly and stealthily opened. Her heart beat to suffocation, and her eyes were

fixed in agony on the curtain that she herself had drawn over the door. Someone was entering her room ; a hand was put out to pull back the curtain, and an arm draped in black. She could bear no more. With a piercing shriek, that rang all through the wing of the silent Château, she fainted. Poor little Toinette, so young, so perplexed, so burthened, so lonely ! But if this beginning of troubles cost her so dear, how would she gather strength to meet those yet to come ?





CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Antoinette again became conscious, she found herself in a room that was not her own. She was lying in bed ; a cheerful wood-fire burned on the hearth, and the *bonne* was standing at the foot of the bed with a glass in her hand, into which she was pouring drops from a phial. She found her own hands and arms too heavy to lift, and that she could neither turn her head nor move herself in bed. But on hearing the slight rustle which her endeavours in this direction made, the nurse turned round with a broad smile of satisfaction, put her arm under the pillow, raised

Toinette's head, and made her drink the contents of the glass, telling her, at the same time, to lie perfectly still, and not to speak. As there was nothing to be done and nothing to be said, Toinette's only resource was to fall asleep—which she did. The next thing that she became conscious of was, that a gentleman with powdered hair, a grave face, dressed in a brown cloth suit, with a large watch in his hand, was standing over her. He also smiled, as if satisfied ; but he said nothing to her ; only nodded his head up and down with great solemnity, and said, ' Sleep — sleep — sleep ! ' Having spoken these oracular words with emphasis, he retired. He probably gave somewhat more definite orders to the *bonne*, who was to be heard talking to him with great volubility outside the door.

As time went on, Antoinette amused herself by taking notes of all the things within range of her sight as she lay. She had discovered that she was in one of the suite

of rooms which belonged specially to her mother, and which opened into her boudoir. There were three engravings on the wall—one of Louis XIV. as a child, one of the late King in his coronation robes, and one of the present King. There was a little old-fashioned oil-painting, too, which she did not remember to have noticed before, but which now interested her. It was of a young girl, with a face full of expression, sweet and tender, yet strong. She was looking upwards, with one hand uplifted, as if speaking earnestly, and the other arm was round the figure of an elder woman, who was regarding the face of the girl as if eagerly following her words, and, in the midst of trouble, taking comfort from them. They stood at the turn of a road, and in the far distance were the buildings of a town, or city, bathed in the setting sun. Before them a rocky pathway, dark and bleak, uninvitingly set forth. Antoinette's mind was too much of a blank to think of anything particularly,

and for long together, as yet. But every time she looked at this picture, she delighted in it more, and felt as if she grew better as she gazed at the young face—so sweet, and yet so strong. When she was able to sit up amongst her pillows, and talk a little, she asked to have the painting in her hands. It was finely and beautifully painted, and there was an Italian name in the corner, in thin white letters. But of the names of painters, and of the merits of pictures, Toinette knew but little. Turning it over in her hand, however, she found in these words a clue to the subject : ‘ Whither thou goest, I will go,’ written on a strip of parchment, which was stretched across it. It was a picture of Ruth and Naomi.

Antoinette had been more than a month lying ill, and was now gradually stealing back to life and health. One day, when she was dressed, and able to sit up on a long, wide couch, which had been made comfortable with wraps and cushions, the

good *bonne* appeared with the savoury chicken which she was now beginning to have appetite to enjoy. By way of amusing her invalid, she began to account for her own presence in the Château, as to which she had said nothing, and evaded all questions, until now. As she chatted, the whole scene of that dreadful night came back to Antoinette. ‘I should never have got well in that room,’ she said.

‘That I also knew,’ said the *bonne*, ‘but—I ask myself—what could have ailed my little one? What, for example, made thee shriek so terribly? Ah, *ciel!* that cry! It rings in my ears even now!’ and she pressed down the wings of her Normandy cap over her gold-laden ears, as if she heard it still.

‘It was the revenant, nurse! I saw it—yes, I myself!’

Antoinette became ghastly pale, and her eyes shone and grew large with horror as she spoke.

‘I saw a hand and arm stretched out to

pull aside that curtain in my ruelle, which hangs over the door of the little chamber ; and a shadowy figure was moving there. I dreaded to see its face. But I was spared that awful sight, and—I remember no more.'

'And if thou hadst seen it, dear heart,' said the *bonne*, with a comic twinkle in her eye, 'what, then, would it have appeared to be ? What shape had this terrible revenant ?'

'Oh, do not ask me !' cried Toinette, covering her face with her little thin hands.

'But I will tell thee. It had a face not young, not ugly, not pretty, not anything, but full of love and anxiety for *mademoiselle* ! Yes, it was I myself, and no other ! I, who came all the way from Paris to take care of *mademoiselle*, and wait upon her ; and who, arriving so late, because the coach broke down, was afraid to disturb the sleep of *mademoiselle*, and yet anxious that she should not wake to be alone, went softly, without shoes, into Dorine's empty chamber

(méchante that she is!), there to be ready for the toilet of mademoiselle; and hoping to find my jewel asleep, I looked, and—voilà tout!

‘Were you, then, the revenant?’ said Antoinette. ‘Was it all a dream? Was everything a dream? Dorine, for example, was she——’

‘Dorine is in Paris, never more to approach Boisfontaine, or contaminate my lily by her presence. Fear not.’

‘In Paris? With my mother?’

La bonne’s hands and eyes were uplifted to the ceiling, and she gave utterance to one word only.

‘Ciel!’

But into that word she threw a whole volume of expression.

Presently she said:

‘And now mademoiselle will sleep—will sleep and get well. In the world there are for mademoiselle no revenants, no Dorines—only I, thy mother’s nurse, and thine.’

‘I am at peace, then,’ said Toinette, with a comfortable sigh. ‘But, nurse, only one thing. Dorine has a little sister. I want her to be brought here, to learn nice ways ; to save you trouble ; to attend me. Say nothing to Grimeau, but do you manage it, dear bonne. Now I will sleep.’





CHAPTER XVIII.



THE Abbé de Vertprés had never ventured into Toinette's sick-room, or even near it. He had an infinite dislike to trouble or sickness, either for himself or other people. His apartments were in the opposite wing of the Château, with the great hall between them, and two staircases to ascend and descend. He said to himself, that with his important avocations and regular habits, with no spare time on his hands, he could wait to see Antoinette until such time as it was considered good for her to come down into the salon. Nevertheless, he was fond of

Toinette, and failed not to interview the *bonne* daily. He had known this worthy woman all her life, and did justice to her integrity and intelligence. If he ever talked as he really thought to anyone, it might be to *la bonne*, whose forefathers had served his forefathers for generations, in peace and in war. He was, at all events, willing to hear anything that she might like to say to him, which was often a good deal. She loved to talk, and the budget of her griefs, her hopes, her fears, her family news, her ideas—all centring in the family—were at least safe in the keeping of Monsieur l'Abbé. To him she could allow herself to speak of Monsieur le Vicomte as he really was, when to any other soul she would have sworn that he was perfect in every way ; and would have perjured herself without a blush to uphold the family name and credit in his worthless person. True, the Abbé did not, on his part, converse much on family affairs. But he was interested ; he

could shrug, and he could gesticulate with his plump white hands; he could smile behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, throw in a phrase here, or an interjection there, and that was sympathy to *la bonne*. Accordingly the Abbé was well versed in all the changes and fluctuations in his niece's condition, and the bulletins of the doctor; and felt happy in the conviction that he had done his duty in writing that letter about her to the Marquise, which had resulted in the opportune appearance of *la bonne*.

On this particular day he was crossing the hall, after dinner, on the way to his sanctum, when he perceived the *bonne* in the act of descending the staircase from Antoinette's side of the house, bent on relating to him the story of the revenant, and its solution. The Abbé beckoned her into the empty salon, and, seating himself in an arm-chair, with his snuff-box in his hand, felt that she had chosen her time well; since he could not apply even to Catullus

immediately after dinner, and could, therefore, spare the necessary leisure for a gossip with this privileged personage without grudging.

‘ Ah well,’ he said, ‘ I do not see much—in fact, I see nothing outside my study ; but I could, at least, comprehend that mademoiselle, my niece, is both too young and too old to be left in a house like this, with time to excess upon her hands, and no companions. No daughter of Eve, my good Nanette, could, as you must know, survive it ; curiosity, lawful or unlawful, must get the better of them ! In mademoiselle’s case it may be either, and is largely developed. Therefore it was that I wrote to madame ; and my conscience is clear. Mademoiselle,’ he added, taking a pinch of snuff, and waving his hand, as he smiled benevolently towards the *bonne*, ‘ mademoiselle is now safe.’

The *bonne*, casting a glance round to see if there was any fear of listeners, began upon another topic : a very sore one, both to herself and to the Abbé.

‘Monsieur le Vicomte—he, then, has been here?’

‘Ah yes. He has been here.’

‘Does monsieur know upon what errand?’

‘I? For me, I know nothing; absolutely nothing. Ask Maître Grimeau,’ and the Abbé gesticulated in the direction in which the surintendant might be supposed to be.

‘Ah,’ said the bonne; ‘Maître Grimeau? It will be money, then?’

‘Money?’ said the Abbé, looking as if the idea had not even occurred to him. ‘And what money, then?’

‘Ah, Monsieur l’Abbé! Is it not in these days that the young rooks destroy and forsake the old rookeries? When the winter comes, what shelter will there be from the storm? Monsieur le Marquis may build up, and lay by, and strive and strive again for the honour of the house—but—after?’

The Abbé turned up his eyes, took snuff, and said ‘After?’ very gravely.

‘And,’ continued the *bonne*, ‘it is not only in regard of money——’

‘But, certainly ; not only money,’ said the Abbé, in a meditative tone.

‘To tell monsieur my mind,’ said the *bonne*, ‘there is a bad spirit abroad ; trying to enter houses, feeling at all the locks, pulling down bars, unfastening bolts—even hinges. And what then ?’

‘Truly, and what then ?’ rejoined the Abbé, pressing the tips of his fingers together, and looking at nothing in particular, as he thought to himself, ‘Our good nurse here becomes figurative, and somewhat vague.’

‘Look, then, at this sweet flower, our *mademoiselle*,’ continued the *bonne*, her honest eyes filling with tears. ‘The so wicked Dorine—pig, owl, bat, that she is ! What lies ! What misery ! What deceit !’

‘Yes,’ said the Abbé, stung for the moment out of his insouciance by the manhood that was in him ; ‘to speak of her is

a loathing. But what, then, of a brother who could thus insult his own sister, and take the wretch away from her very service? Bah! Deceit—yes, that, indeed, is true!

‘Monsieur l’Abbé’s good heart must truly have ached. It was, doubtless, when monsieur knew all, that he wrote for me.’

‘Well, in fact,’ owned the Abbé, very unwilling to allow this weakness, ‘my heart did ache. And I, myself, what could I do? It is, however, that there are times, *ma bonne*, when I am asleep, and yet I am not asleep. I have, before now, heard things. And *mademoiselle* is a great charge. She is—in short, she is too English. Take care of her, therefore. Meantime, you may give her this packet: it may serve to paint her cheek with roses, and to throw sunshine into her recovery and her future. Plainly, then, in a fortnight from this day, monsieur and madame, with the household, come again to Boisfontaine. Desolated with *chagrin*

and anxiety, on account of mademoiselle's illness, they hope to find her restored to health on their return. So your work is before you, *ma bonne*. When may I have the pleasure of again seeing mademoiselle downstairs ?


‘To-morrow, I wish it, if monsieur pleases.’

‘Till to-morrow, then,’ said the Abbé, waving his hand as the *bonne* retired with her packet of letters for mademoiselle.





CHAPTER XIX.

HE comfortable presence of the good nurse, her devotion and care, did Antoinette more good than the medicines of the doctor. She discovered, with much satisfaction, that she had grown in height considerably. Besides which, as she grew in bodily health, she felt a mental craving, a wish to fill up her mind and her time with books. Reading had never seemed so attractive to her. And, as she wandered about the suite of rooms which belonged to her father and mother, she found, in the private sitting-room of the Marquis, a well-chosen library, which in-

cluded several English books, and which gave her many a quiet hour of enjoyment.

This time of convalescence was a kind of break between the separate portions of her life ; a blessed period of rest and growth, in which her powers were permitted to strengthen for what was to come.

The return of the family to Boisfontaine had been postponed from week to week, as the Court had gone to St. Cloud : an enjoyment which, whether on duty or not, Madame la Marquise would not have been persuaded to forego a share in. It was now, therefore, the beginning of August, 1788, and life within the cool, thick walls of the Château, in the heat of the day, and *al fresco* meals under the shadow of umbrageous trees, after sunset, made the soft monotony of the time very soothing. The *bonne* was always near, always watching over her charge. There was no such thing as straying amongst by-walks after white pullets, or wandering about on exploring expeditions after weep-

ing *pauvrettes* now. But, in truth, partly from the lassitude of her recovery, and partly from a dread of reopening the vexed questions which had so puzzled and absorbed her unripe intelligence as to bring her to the verge of the grave, the events of the weeks before her illness seemed in a fair way to be blotted out from her recollection, or at least laid to sleep there ; when again an incident occurred which aroused and startled her. She was passing an upper window at the end of a long corridor which looked out on the servants' offices, when she heard *Maitre Grimeau's* voice, and that of some other person speaking with him. She was moving away, not having the least wish to overhear any conversation in which *Grimeau* had a part, when the words, '*Monsieur le Vicomte,*' and '*Death,*' caught her ear. As she stood with beating heart, dreading what was to come—yet, as it were, forced to listen—she heard a tale which greatly disturbed and frightened her.

A messenger, evidently just arrived, was telling how he had been despatched from Paris to Boisfontaine, to bring back moneys still due to monsieur, his master, and which had been left in Grimeau's hands, until the order was sent for their payment. Another messenger had been sent some days ago; but, as he had not returned, Monsieur le Vicomte, becoming impatient, had ordered him, the speaker, to make inquiry as to this delay. As he rode to Boisfontaine, he had seen a man lying by the roadside in the agonies of death. It was the missing messenger. He had been waylaid, his bag of money taken from him, and had been terribly beaten, and left for dead. He, however, had strength left to tell his tale, and how he was carrying the money from Boisfontaine to Paris when the deed was done.

‘Yes,’ said Grimeau, ‘it was but yesterday that I was able to despatch him on that errand. I had to make up the bag as I best might, after keeping him here three days.

It was on its way to Monsieur de Salis. I hate that boy! And yet I obey him, and refuse him nothing. Why is it? I have had nothing from him but curses and threats, and but little indeed of thanks. Well, some day the tide will turn. His time is not far off. It is fated that either he must be my death, or I his. It is for me to choose. Judge, then, my friend, which of us shall outlive the other?

Turning on his heel, he was moving away, when the man said :

‘But this money—it will be replaced? otherwise I shall be in the Bicêtre, or some other dungeon.’

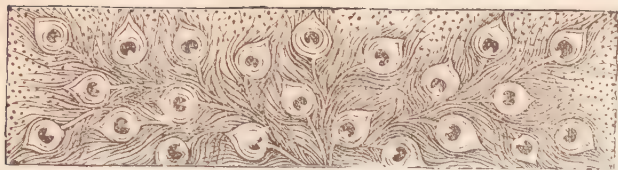
‘Replaced!’ said the surintendant, with a kind of shriek; ‘and from what treasury?’

‘Monsieur alone knows,’ said the messenger, with an unpleasant laugh.


‘I tell thee, thou idiot, that were the King to demand from the estate again, I could not pay. I have to render an account to Monsieur le Marquis next month. Well,

I know not how to do it. Thrice—nay, four times, have I in this six months supplied his son with money, wrung, I scarce know how, from the people. They are now not living, but dying, on black bread, and the corn and grass of the field that the beasts dispute with them. They die, I tell thee; they care not to live. And I—I, Grimeau, surintendant of the estates of Boisfontaine—I know not how to make either food or money! Let the winter advance, and the land will be a grave, a sepulchre of the famished! Some must suffer for this.'





CHAPTER XX.

T last the looked-for day arrived, when, to the relief and content of the Abbé, as well as of la bonne, the Marquis and Marquise returned together to Boisfontaine. The Château was once more alive with servants, the stables again occupied, and the coach-houses filled with the carriages and equipages of a great noble and his entourage.

This time, as Madame de Boisfontaine embraced her daughter, a quite different series of thoughts crossed her mind to those first impressions which had been so disappointing. For a change had come over

Toinette. She was now recovered from her illness, though she still bore traces of its severity in the transparency of her complexion, and the changeful colour that went and came so easily. And she had sprung up from a child into a woman, as it seemed, all at once. If we may judge from the miniature painted in the winter of this year at the time of her presentation at Court, she must have been beautiful. Her eyes, which are dark and brilliant, have a thoughtful look of early maturity in them, which the marked line of the eyebrows accentuates and deepens. The hair is tied loosely back, and is much lighter in colour than the eyebrows and lashes; and there is an unmistakable air of high-breeding, and also of individuality, about the portrait, which vouches for its verisimilitude as a likeness.

‘Ah, but she is lovely!’ thought the Marquise. ‘What a change! And this is Toinette! But she is more lovely than

mademoiselle de Château Saint-Marc—more lovely than any of her age at Court! What a sensation! What a triumph for us!

As for Toinette, she also was happy, and charmed to be with her mother. The bustle and stir in the Château were delightful to her, and she hardly knew herself to be the same girl, lonely and depressed, who had perplexed her heart and brain to the very gate of death over problems which she could not solve. Several days passed as if winged, during which Toinette began to bloom and thrive under the influence of her happiness. Her girlish eyes were charmed with the beautiful dresses, jewels, and rich possessions of her mother, as she watched the *femmes de chambre* and *la bonne* arranging them in the great walnut presses and almonries in madame's apartments. And she never tired of hearing anecdotes of the Queen and her children, and of all the gaieties of that brilliant Court, into

which she was to make her débüt in the coming winter.

But although she felt within her all the delightful spring of returning life and health, and the sense of relief from the unknown responsibilities which had so pressed upon her as to go near to endangering her existence, she had not forgotten the past, which, indeed, at times returned upon her memory with increasing force. She could not lose the knowledge of all that wrong and oppression which jarred its minor chords through the pleasant distractions of the life she was leading now.

At this time Antoinette saw much more of her father than she had as yet done. She began to admire and understand him, and was quick to observe the honour and respect paid to him, over and above that due to his rank, not only by his family, but by the passing guests who so frequently came and went at Boisfontaine. It was to be that Antoinette should yet more fully

understand this upright counsellor and tried friend of the King ; and the opportunity was near.

One morning the Marquise desired Antoinette to come to her quite early, and she then told her that letters of importance had that morning arrived from Paris, some of which contained news which would eventually affect Toinette herself ; and, after exciting her interest (or, as the Abbé would have affirmed, her Eve-like curiosity) to some extent, added that monsieur, her father, would himself communicate to her all that it was necessary for her to know. Accordingly a servant brought her a message, saying that Monsieur le Marquis begged mademoiselle to do him the favour to attend him in his private room.

‘ Be a good daughter, Toinette, my jewel,’ said the Marquise, kissing her with unwonted effusion ; ‘ be always good to your father. He has troubles—and——’

‘ And to you, my beautiful mother,’ said

Antoinette, gaily kissing her hand, and hastening away to answer the unwonted summons, not at all suspecting what was to make this interview so momentous to her. But the thought uppermost in her mind as she stood on the threshold of her father's apartment, into which she was being ushered with punctilious ceremony by his valet, was, 'Now I shall see my father, and converse with him. The time is come. I shall tell him all.'

A sort of instantaneous impression stamped itself on the mind of Antoinette as she entered, and the door closed behind her. 'My father,' she began, much in the same way as she would have addressed her uncle, Sir Geoffrey Leigh, on entering his study. But the Marquis, who was writing at a table spread over with documents and papers with large seals affixed, held up his hand as if to command silence, and pointed to a chair. She remembered him afterwards just as he looked then, with his hair

powdered and tied, a suit of dark red velvet, laced with silver, and silver buckles in his shoes. He was rather broad-set than elegant in figure ; but his whole appearance was exquisitely finished, neat and precise. He had a face more strongly marked than handsome, with black, well-defined eyebrows, and steady, clear gray eyes. The mouth, somewhat supercilious when at rest, had in speaking a resolved and withal a pleasing expression ; and the nose was decidedly an obstinate nose. Altogether, though there was no stamp of genius or even great talent in the face, there was abundance of character. Nothing soft or tender, perhaps ; rather a look that commanded respect, and, in the straightforward glance, honesty of purpose. ‘Before all things honest,’ had said the Abbé, in describing him ; and Toinette remembered the words, and applied them.

Presently the Marquis laid down his pen ; and, putting aside the papers before him, looked up at Toinette. It was an ab-

stracted, far-away look at first ; and she did not disturb him by speaking, but began to wonder within herself for what purpose she could be wanted there. The silence was becoming oppressive. The sun was blazing in with summer heat, lighting up the panels of dark wood all round the room, and shining on the grim pictures of armed heroes of various generations which hung upon the walls. It shone upon Antoinette's hair from the bay window behind her, and all the little tendrils that never would lie down shone about her face like threads of gold. Her attitude was expectant ; and she sat alert as if ready to obey or to hear, whichever might be required of her.

At length the Marquis perceived and understood this look, and said :

— ' You have come, then, my daughter ? Listen ; for I have somewhat to announce to you, which your mother and I have agreed upon long ago, regarding your future. By unforeseen events, this has come upon

us rather sooner and more suddenly than I could have anticipated, or, I may say, desired. Nevertheless, I will—I have no choice but to inform you regarding it. You have,’ said the Marquis, with a certain formality of manner—‘you have until so lately been absent from your own family, your own country, and your own duties as our only daughter, that you are almost a stranger amongst us. Your health, and our anxiety, obliged us to send you away to the care of madame, your aunt——’

‘Such loving care, my father!’ said Toinette eagerly.

‘All that, my child ; all that. But do not interrupt me. This enforced absence, and your so late return—again, our absence and your illness, have occasioned that I have until now postponed informing you of your destiny. In short, you were, as an infant, promised in marriage to the only son of my friend and whilom coadjutor in office, the Duc de St. Gaudens. This promise will be

ratified in due time. Monsieur de Vezécque will arrive here this very evening, according to his own letter. And—and—I permit myself, my dear daughter, to hope that there can be no doubt of your exceedingly happy future, and abundant good fortune.'

Antoinette, wholly unprepared for this overwhelming intelligence, and entirely swallowed up as by a great wave in the rapidity and nearness of its approach, was unable to speak one word. She was even yet not fully recovered from the illness which had shaken her very life. She became all at once white and faint, as one who has received a shock too suddenly for her strength. The room appeared to swim round her, and the armed warriors to dance in a manner ill according with their native grimness. But it passed, and with a great effort she rallied herself, and stretched out her hand mechanically for the glass of succory-water which stood on a salver close by. The Marquis saw, and understood. A

feeling of self-reproach touched him. He was vexed with himself for having been so precipitate. A great pity stole into his heart; the white face looked so pinched, and the little outstretched hand shook so. And then the effort to rally was so distinct and so brave: a kind of spirit to which he was wholly unaccustomed in a woman. He estimated it at its worth; and Antoinette, with her feminine weakness, and her strong, pure nature, had won her father's heart. This, then, was also his child—this young girl before him. How unlike that other, whose existence was grief, vexation, anger, and a constant wonder and shame to the proud, upright noble, the honours of whose house he must inherit. He spoke with so much kindness, and, although with authority, with so much sense and directness, that the kindred chords in Antoinette's nature responded in a music of their own. She was so taken by surprise, that she had not a word to say when he desired her to think over

this astounding communication. 'It must be a dream,' she thought for one moment.

'Come hither, my daughter,' and he led Antoinette to his own easy-chair, and took another near her. 'Listen,' he said kindly. 'You are not to fret or trouble yourself. Leave all to your parents with confidence. You will not be hurried. You will have full and ample liberty. No pressure will be put upon you. Your mother will fulfil her promise to present you at Versailles this winter. All that we can do to make you happy will be done. And Monsieur de Vezécque is only in France for a time, and he then returns with levies to America. After that, on his next visit to Paris, all things can be arranged.'

Antoinette breathed more freely. Her countenance, so easy to read, brightened at once. Her eyes shone ; the colour returned to her face ; and she looked up and smiled.

'I thank you, my father,' she said, bending forward to kiss the hand of the Marquis ;

‘ I will think of all you say. And now, may I say something to you ?’

‘ Ha ! little English one !’ said her father, pleased and satisfied, and on his part somewhat relieved that he had discharged his duty well. ‘ What have you to say, then—to ask ? Some jewels, I think ? A pair of diamond earrings, for example, like those of madame, your mother ?—eh ? Some pin-money in hand ? Dresses for the coming winter at Court ? Speak, *ma belle*. What I can do, I will do.’

‘ Ah, no, my father ; none of these,’ said Toinette, whose thoughts were running on a very different subject. ‘ I do so much wish to ask you—is Maitre Grimeau, the sur-intendant, then, a good man ?’

Had a bomb-shell fallen at the Marquis’s feet, he could not have been more surprised, or more completely thrown off his balance.

‘ Grimeau ?’ he stammered. ‘ Grimeau a good man ? How, then ? What have you heard of Grimeau ?’

Then the very perplexity, the extravagant inappropriateness of her question, struck him so forcibly as to anger him. He rose, looked grave and stern :

‘ I do not comprehend, mademoiselle,’ he said, with an air of hauteur which would have disconcerted some people. But this father and daughter were destined to know and to appreciate each other. Once for all, that was to happen to them to-day. They were to look beyond the relationship of father and child ; of a man grown old at Court, and in affairs of State—but before all things honest ; and a girl so young, but awakening to a life strong and pure, and also, above all things, honest—that is, *true*. They stood face to face ; and the fearless soul of each stood before the other looking out of and away from themselves, to scan the problems that were before them ; to scan that seething future which perplexed both.

‘ This is truly the whole of it, sire. I

cannot find it out for myself. It haunts me day and night. It was that which made me ill ; for here no one knows, or hears, or sees anything. If, my father, Grimeau is a good man, why does he oppress the poor, and rob them—your people—and say that he does it for you ? If he is not good ; if is bad, deceitful, cruel, why is he then permitted to serve you—you who are good and just ?’

The Marquis sat down ; and Toinette—neither shy nor afraid, but reading her permission in his face—Toinette told him, as she had so often dreamed of doing, all that she knew and had seen ; always drawing a veil over Armand and his visit for money. Whilst she talked on, she noticed that her father’s face betrayed now interest, now anger, now surprise. At length a settled gloom and gravity fell upon him.

‘Enough,’ he said. ‘We have each something to think over. I shall ask you to return hither this time to-morrow, that I

may hear more. Remember, then, that I meanwhile lay upon you this command—but it *is* a command—that you speak of this to no other person. Have you done so ?

‘My uncle—he and I were together when I saw that terrible sight.’

‘And he ? what said monsieur the philosopher ?’

‘He said—but then, my uncle says always the same thing—“ I know—nothing ; I see—nothing ; I hear—nothing !” ’ and Toinette gave a little shrug before each repetition of the word ‘ nothing,’ which at any other time would have been droll.

Monsieur le Marquis looked contemptuous, and shrugged his shoulders too.

‘ Well, well,’ he said, ‘ I am not like Monsieur l’Abbé. I do hear and see a great deal ; these are very strange times. There is evil abroad ; and the clouds seem to me to gather round France. Monsieur Necker is a great man ; but were he a giant, I doubt if he could stop the rolling of

the stone which has been set in motion by a number of meddlers who know not what they do. I must be alone. I must think, little one. Go, then. Do you also think ; and understand, on your part, that much rests upon you. Join me here to-morrow. I will say to you more, and surprise myself with the charming acquisition of a friend, a counsellor, a confidante in—my little English daughter—English—but true fine fleur of France, and of my ancient house.’

As the Marquis, not without emotion, said these words, Antoinette rose to leave him ; and he embraced her, saying :

‘ The good God has sent thee to me in an acceptable time.’

He then rang a silver bell, and Antoinette, although she was his daughter, was ushered from his room to the door of her own apartment with all the ceremony by which it was the habit of his life to be surrounded, and of which he suffered no diminution to be made in his own presence.



CHAPTER XXI.



HERE was that in the air—the surcharged air of those times—which tried and tested the character marvellously. And as surely as the heat of its terrible fires destroyed, blighted, and scorched some, so it developed into early fulness the promise of good in others. A great change had come to Antoinette in these few months since she had been at Boisfontaine. She seemed to herself to have no identity with the girl in the brown pelisse, who had tried to keep back her tears at parting with those who had made her childhood such a happy one; and who

had gone down into her cabin to weep, and weep almost all the journey through ; and who had arrived at Boisfontaine so childlike and so uninformed. When she was alone she sat down to think ; and as she thought, the revelation of a strange secret came to Antoinette ; a secret which had lain quietly hitherto in the depths of her heart, and made no sign. She became conscious that in all the world there was but one person whom she could love with that ideal, yet possible and perfect love, which is the greatest happiness of earth. That one was Geoffrey Leigh.

So completely had they two grown up together that it had not occurred to Antoinette that she could ever be wholly separated from Geoffrey. When they had parted on the quay at Southampton it had seemed but for a time. Geoffrey had said, ‘ Remember, I will see you again.’ And she had said, ‘ I shall come back to you, Aunt Marguerite,’ as a natural thing. When and

how had nothing to do with it. Yes, Geoffrey had said that *whatever* happened he would see her again. A deeper meaning seemed to attach itself to his words now. He had not, evidently, thought of her coming back to England, but of his coming to France to see her. ‘And he will,’ thought Toinette. ‘He is as true as steel. He will come to see me. But when? Where shall I be? How shall we meet? As strangers?’ And to-night she was to meet the man whom it was the will of her parents that she should marry. She was their only daughter. She had one duty to fulfil—the duty of obedience. There was no escape. It was laid upon her, and she had, according to their notions, no voice in the matter; according to her freer English ideas, the power at least to disobey. This unknown fiancé might be hateful, or he might be everything charming and good. He might be grave and stern, yet honest, like her father; again (she shuddered at the thought), he might be heartless and flippant,

like Armand. It was whilst she considered this, that she became aware of the depth of her regard for Geoffrey.

For a while she sat in a dreamy fashion, and an inexpressible yearning welled up in her heart for sympathy, for advice, for all that she would have had at Leigh of love and help in her need. The intensity of her trouble and her loneliness rose up before her like a great wave. It seemed to advance and rear itself between her and the fair prospect outside ; it drew nearer, it caught and wrapped her in its darkness, and broke over her young head with a power proportioned to the strength of her nature. But even as it broke, its cold waters dispersed on every side, and she, as it retreated, was left upright and alone, with the sun shining out upon her. She saw with cleared vision. Two ways were before her, and she deliberately chose the hardest. She would obey. And that not with a grudging obedience. This was her secret—hers and no other's. It

must be buried, and in silence—hidden for ever from the light. Meantime it was for her to pray that this betrothed, to whom she had been promised before she could reason or remember, would at least be one whom she could regard, and not despise. Some one strong, like her father, and true ; not frivolous and vain, like Armand ; nor yet like the kindly, but selfish and self-wrapt Abbé. Thus she mused, and rallying the energies of her mind, began to look about her at the reality of things, which were becoming clearer to her every day. She saw her mother, sweet, languid, grande dame, altogether charming, but the last to whom she could look for advice. The Abbé, full of book-lore, full of the ideas of the ‘philosophers,’ and of the new opinions ; aristocrat in fact, sceptic in theory only ; incapable of seeing around him, yet shrewdly conscious of much that he would not see. Expecting always the coming of that deluge—après ; but quite aware that there was to

be a deluge, and that it was coming. Lastly, her father. Little as she had until now known him, she had this day felt, with unerring intuition, that he was the one amongst all these with whom she had anything in common. And one thing cheered her ; even now, as she recalled it, it thrilled her with delight. This confidant of the King, this great man, honest and upright, this father of whom she was so proud, had said to her at parting these words, ‘ The good God has sent thee to me in an acceptable time.’ The depths of Toinette’s affectionate nature were stirred as by a power, as she recalled this, and how he had said that he would trust and take counsel with his little English daughter—English, and yet French. Never would she hesitate or regret any sacrifice he might require of her ; and that it would be a sacrifice how should he divine ? Never would she come short, on her part, of anything he might lay upon her.

Mercifully for the weakness of our mortal

nature, these great calls upon our strength come after preparation, and little incidents occur between which lift and relieve the tension that would otherwise be too great. Antoinette, exhausted by the conflict of thought which she had just passed through, laid herself down upon her bed and fell asleep, like a tired child. She slept for hours, unconscious of the entrance of the *bonne*, whose anxiety brought her there at frequent intervals during the afternoon, unconscious of the soft wrap thrown over her, of the curtain unlooped to keep out the sunlight, unconscious of everything but rest and peace, and the sweet oblivion that was restoring her to power of body and mind. And she slept on, with the childish look upon her brow, and the rest upon her whole attitude, until late in the afternoon. Then she awoke, to find the kind old *bonne* standing by with a cup of chocolate, which she was glad enough to partake of.

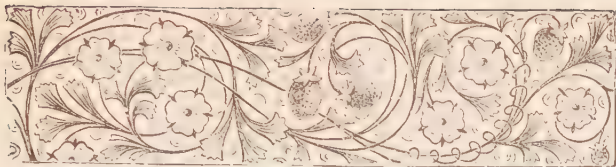
‘And now, my *bijou*,’ said she, laying her

hand upon a heap of white muslin which lay on a chair close by, ‘you must certainly rise. Madame has asked for you more than once. She is now herself dressing to receive company. She sends you this. It is a dress such as the Queen wears when she retires to the Trianon—such an one as the Queen’s own daughter wears. No hoop, no train, you perceive,’ she said, holding it up. ‘Ah, what changes! When madame’s mother went to Court in the late King’s reign—nay, when madame herself went to Court as a bride, for example, and long after, such things were not, could not have been, my mademoiselle! The late Queen would have been aroused to chasser from before her such a toilette,’ she went on, eying the heap of muslin with a shrug of contempt. ‘Yes, had it been worn by the greatest lady of the Court. Mesdames the King’s aunts, for example, would now object, if one could hear them! I know—I myself have seen! Nevertheless, we have the

order of madame ; we must, then, obey ; and, in truth,' continued the garrulous bonne, 'thou art charming in it ;' and she stood a little way off to survey Toinette standing before her in a long, straight skirt of Indian muslin, ruffled here and there with priceless Valenciennes ; a pelerine of the same, crossed in front and tied round her slender waist in a knot or bow, and her hair in its natural state, unpowdered.

'Now,' she said, 'here is old nurse's finishing touch ;' and she fastened at the waist a half-blown crimson rose, fragrant and fresh gathered. 'Truly, then, old fashion or new, I care not—I say the tout ensemble is very good. Let us hasten, that mademoiselle may join the company.'





CHAPTER XXII.



ANTOINETTE'S first sensation on entering the salon was a shy hesitation both natural and becoming on such an occasion. In order that our readers may imagine for themselves the scene before her, we will do our best to describe it.

The salon was a large and beautiful room, the most modernized of any in the Château. Handsome girandoles hung from the ceiling ; the furniture was of the age Louis Quinze, a wedding gift to madame from her husband. Flowers were abundant everywhere, and a harpsichord—which madame had once played

upon in imitation of the Queen—stood open. A wood-fire was burning on the hearth, and at the same time the windows were open to the terrace. On one side of the fireplace sat Madame la Marquise, with her hair raised and powdered, wearing a rich brocaded dress, the train of which was drawn through the pocket-holes for home wear. On the other side was Monsieur le Marquis, in a black velvet suit. The Abbé was there, too, in his soutane, smiling rosily behind his gold spectacles, gesticulating with his plump white hands, taking snuff with enjoyment, and now and then shaking a grain or two of powder from his hair in the energy of a remark.

Standing rather forward in their midst was a young man about twenty-eight years of age. He was a remarkable-looking personage both in appearance and dress, and quite unlike any of the home-group amongst whom he stood. He was dressed in a brown cloth suit, gold buckles in his shoes,

and his hair tightly clubbed and tied, but without powder. His ruffles were of the finest cambric, but without lace. He wore a small sword, unornamented, except that the hilt was of plain gold. His face was not handsome, but grave and pleasant, particularly when he smiled.

To this rather formidable coterie entered Toinette, shy, but quite herself now; her slender white figure ‘gliding’—as Monsieur de Vezécque might have said—in amongst them, towards her mother. Then taking his guest by the hand, the Marquis brought him forward, and presenting him, said :

‘This, my daughter, is Monsieur de Vezécque, of whom you have heard. Monsieur, this is my daughter.’

Antoinette made her curtsy (‘not so ill for a wildflower,’ madame encouragingly told her afterwards). She then gave one shy but straightforward glance into the face of her betrothed, and there met one equally straight, and not on the whole displeasing.

The evening was perhaps a trifle ennuyeux and tedious, for both monsieur and madame were accustomed to certain etiquettes, which could not be laid aside on such an occasion. Eventually the supper was served, and after it the usual games of cards, with the usual ceremonies, took place. Antoinette would have liked to slip quietly out of the open window and to walk on the terrace in the twilight of the evening. But she sat dutifully near her mother, holding her gloves and her painted fan, and watching her fair jewelled fingers, as she moved the cards about, with untiring admiration. By-and-by she moved a little apart, and sat looking at the group before her, until its details stamped an indelible picture for ever on her remembrance. It was a perfect representation of the time, each person there being typical of his caste. There was the Marquis, a noble specimen of the best of his rank and race ; there was the Marquise, exquisite in manner, perfect in breeding,

lovely in person, having two passions—dress and the Queen—both of the most devoted loyalty, yet as fatally inadequate to breast the storm which was looming in the near future as any other friends who would have sacrificed their all to save the throne. There was the Abbé, type of the order which he and his kind had betrayed, who believed no dogmas, entertained no future, derided and misconceived the present, to whom the souls of human beings were nonentities. There, too, was her fiancé, pre-eminently a man of the day, full of great schemes for the people—such schemes as Lafayette and Montcalm were carrying out abroad; a man who had travelled, assuredly, and who had thought a little, and seen something of the world outside; a man of the new order, in fact, who would renew the old world, and readjust the balance of things, mending the threadbare robe of old France with material too new and too strong. And there was

Toinette, who belonged to all, and yet to none of these, but who was a true noble-hearted woman, born to sustain, to lift up, and to suffer.

At last the evening came to an end. The last game was played out; the wax-lights were burning low; Madame la Marquise again took her scented gloves, and, rising, everyone took leave of each other. Then, with a decision of purpose which trod on the borders of etiquette—madame was inclined to think it a trifle beyond them, according to her notions—Monsieur de Vezécque approached Toinette, and said in a low, grave voice :

‘ Shall I be permitted to see mademoiselle alone—to-morrow?’ and waited distinctly for an answer.

Toinette looked towards her mother, who pretended not to hear, and dropped her fan, which the Marquis stooped for and presented to her with elaborate grace. Driven, therefore, on her own resources, thus, at the

outset, she turned with a pretty half-hesitating air, and said :

‘ After dinner, on the terrace, if monsieur wishes it.’





CHAPTER XXIII.



UNCTUAL to the appointed time, on the following day Antoinette appeared in her father's apartment. Last night he had watched her slight figure moving into the circle to receive the homage of her betrothed husband, and had felt a pang, as he thought, that but for the exigencies of the times he would not have spared from beneath his roof-tree so young and fair a creature. To-day he saw her grave, staid air, and felt her to be in sympathy with himself; worthy of the trust he intended to repose in her. Motioning her to a chair, the Marquis was

silent for a moment, as if he did not quite know how to prelude what he had to say. At last he turned to her, saying :

‘This place is not like England, my daughter?’

‘No,’ said Toinette, startled, and colouring brightly. ‘But it is a lovely place—a far grander place than Leigh. I delight in it. But oh, my dear father, if only——’

‘Speak ; explain, then.’

‘If we could but approach the people ! If the people would but love us !’

‘Ah !’ said the Marquis. ‘There you say all. You place before yourself, in one instant, the truth. But listen. It is too late now. I—for my part, I wish them well. The King—there is no one more anxious to help the people ; he has, before all things, the love for his people weighing upon his generous heart. The Queen—I have known her to give up money, jewels, pleasures, to give more to the people. I have known her teach the children of

France—her own charming children—how to give largely, graciously, at their own loss and deprivation, to the people. But it is too late. The people are our enemies. It remains, therefore, that we defend ourselves. For me, I belong to the King ; and the people are his enemies as well as ours. We see too late ; we, the nobles. The deluge is upon us. We will save the throne ; if not, we can die with the King.’

The Marquis talked on in a low, impassioned voice, losing sight of the fact that it was Antoinette who was listening with great eyes and hearing ears, with all her soul absorbed in what he said. He could not thus have spoken to his son, and assuredly not to his wife. Lost in deep thought, it was some moments before he spoke again.

‘ Now,’ he said at length, ‘ the result of all this is, that everything is out of routine. There is no order. The great machine of state government is no longer smooth and

easy of motion. Its movements are irregular, convulsive, unaccountable. We are constantly shaken by unexpected events ; lifted off our feet, as it were, by advancing waters, which again recede for awhile, and return to shake us yet more. The last three months have been very difficult to me—to all of us who think. But we are of the few. There are too many who see, and know nothing, whom the turbid waters are pushing to their doom. Such an one is Monsieur le Vicomte, my son—your brother. Wrapped in the downy robe of insolent ignorance, he sleeps on a bed of roses. Steeped in a perfumed idleness, he has—I say it with agony as well as with indignation—as much heart, as much brain, as much of the common prescience of self-preservation as the papillon whom he resembles. He is my son—I know it ! He is the heir of my house—I know it ! Judge, then, if he, and such as he, can be loved by the people—respected by them ! Rather say hated and

despised. Ah, ciel ! what misery ! what anguish ! what shame !

The Marquis paused, and walked to the window to regain his self-command. Antoinette said not a word. Her feminine tact showed her that the truest comfort would be to receive this outburst in silence. That he should have spoken before her thus, in terms so unlike those in which a great noble, and that noble a Frenchman, would in those days have addressed his child—a daughter, and so untried and young—was of itself a proof of how the old order of things—the routine, as he had said—was being shaken by the incoming waters.

‘ Now,’ resumed her father, ‘ the reason I desire you to attend me to-day is this : I am about to return to my duties at Court. I know not when I may return. Truly, it may be that my return may be very indefinitely postponed. There are one or two valuables—heirlooms, in fact—which I am about to place in safety. To you I

desire to entrust the secret of their hiding-place. Whether the time will come when De Salis shall succeed to these honours and domains is a thing hidden from us ; but whether they be destined to revert or not, I place their interest and their safety with you, my daughter. For yourself, I am satisfied that your future is in the best hands. Monsieur de Vezécque is a man to be trusted in all events. When the storm comes, rely upon him. Behold !

The Marquis raised the lid of a large oak chest which stood under the window, and was in the act of stooping down towards it, when the door of the apartment opened suddenly, and his valet stood in the doorway, staring in a well-bred but observant way into the room.

‘ And what ? ’ said the Marquis with grave dignity, and looking quietly at the man.

‘ Monsieur’s bell ; monsieur rang.’

‘ But no,’ said the Marquis.

The man disappeared with an almost imperceptible shrug.

‘See, then,’ he continued, ‘one of the vermin that swim in upon us on the advancing waters. He is but lately in my service, and he is devoured by a lawless curiosity. I dare not leave any document of importance about ; for, more than once, I have seen things in the gazette which no one but myself or a traitor spy could have known. I must, at least, rid myself of his presence in my household. It also shows me that, in view of my departure from Boisfontaine, it is needful that I, yet living, make, as it were, my testament to one who shall be as myself.’

He then took from the chest a square ebony box, and showed Antoinette the contents.

‘Here,’ he said, ‘I deposit the title deeds of the estate ; and in this little casket you perceive a ring. The diamond in it was given by Anne of Austria to an ancestor of

ours. It came from the Spanish Indies. When the worst is over, and things return to the old order, my descendants may claim all these things. The casket I give you, and write on it, as you see, "For my daughter, Antoinette de Vertprés de Boisfontaine." Some day, who can say? it may afford you money in time of need—perhaps in America, if you eventually settle there. It is said by experts to be a finer stone than the Sanci, which the Queen wears.'

'I shall pray that the good God will keep me with you, my father, and with my mother,' she said, kissing his hand, and greatly touched by his goodness.

'Now,' said the Marquis, as he quietly took the precaution of fastening the door of his room, 'come into my oratory.'

So saying, he opened a panel in the wainscot, which she had never before noticed, and she entered with him into a minute apartment, where was an altar supporting a crucifix, and lighted from a slit in the turret

wall, filled with ancient coloured glass. When her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, Antoinette saw her father remove the altar, and, drawing aside the rich hangings behind it, press on the face of the building until he touched a stone, so perfectly one with the bare surface of the wall of the tourelle that no one, not in the secret, could have discovered how dextrously it was fastened by a movable spring into the structure itself. With the dexterity of experience he took out this stone, and, beckoning her to come near, laid in the hollow which it revealed the ebony box, with its valuable contents. He then replaced all as he had found them, and drawing Toinette before the altar, put his hands upon her head as she knelt, and solemnly commended her to God.


‘My daughter,’ he said, as they returned to the larger room, both impressed by the occasion, ‘I am now an old man; and I hear much of the new opinions, and the scepticism of the age, which has deified Vol-

taire and Rousseau. But I was taught in another school. I had the honour to be a page in the service of the late Queen. She was a saint, and she had great sorrows. Now that I am in my sorrows, I often recall her axioms and sayings. She was clever and epigrammatic, and perhaps her odd and bourgeoise expressions made one remember her words better; but her wisdom was above the wisdom of this world. "When all fails," she would say, "and to stand firm seems impossible, stand on the wood of the Cross: it will float with you." In these times, when the waters are creeping into our churches, our castles, our palaces, and flooding the world we live in, I remember that saying. Do thou remember it also.'





CHAPTER XXIV.

N the simplicity and truthfulness of her nature, Antoinette had no idea of playing the coquette with Monsieur de Vezécque. She had promised to meet him on the terrace after dinner, and out on the terrace she went to meet him. To an ordinary suitor it might possibly have been a little disappointing ; a trifle wanting in flavour and piquancy, this absence of all hesitation or apparent shyness. It might also have been a little embarrassing to saunter up and down in all the glare of all the windows of the Château—looking out, not from a distance, but quite close,

as if they had spectacles on, and could minutely inspect every button on his coat, and all the rather ostentatious absences of powder, laces, jewels, feathers, in a man of his rank — so unquestionably of the old noblesse, yet tinged with Franklin-worship, and all the New World affectations. And to see his betrothed coming out to meet him there, before all the world, so demure and quiet, her train looped up, her black lace hood tied under her chin, without a smile or a dimple on her face—to see her gravely advance, and, in the English fashion, put her hand into his, without any of the nods, or becks, or wreathed smiles conventionally due to the occasion—this might have daunted some people. But on the contrary. Monsieur de Vezécque was a plain man himself. He had seen life outside, and not only in the world of the Court, where his hereditary place knew very little of him. He knew better that great world, where the real questions of the age were being fought

out, and where the young became old very quickly. And this girlish figure, and the beautiful earnest face, attracted him as he had never before been attracted. He had certainly come to Boisfontaine, partly out of respect to the Marquis, and also from motives of honour ; to fulfil, in part, the contract made for him—to at least make acquaintance with his fiancée. The result appeared to him altogether different to any that he had figured to himself.

‘The world is full of surprises,’ he reflected, as he advanced to meet her. ‘After having had the honour of madame’s acquaintance for some years past, *this* promises to be the greatest surprise of all.’

‘This is truly amiable on the part of mademoiselle,’ he began ; ‘I had hardly dared to expect it.’

Toinette looked up with a questioning face.

‘Monsieur requested me to come, and I consented. Is it not so ?’ she answered gravely.

‘But it is that young demoiselles, whom I have met elsewhere, sometimes seek to lead their friends and their acquaintances wild dances, and find it within their province to mislead, or tantalize,’ he could not help saying, smiling as he spoke.

‘But I, for example, was brought up in England, monsieur ; and the English are—different.’

As they stood thus, madame herself came out on the terrace, with Monsieur le Marquis, which altered the face of things a good deal—so De Vezécque thought. As they sauntered slowly, lending their countenance to the young couple—in a manner which he thought ‘Old World,’ and unnecessary, and which the Marquise, on the contrary, felt to be due to all parties—chocolate was served, and the conversation became general. Monsieur l’Abbé joined the group, with Catullus under his arm, and the bonne came out to hover in a general way ; now standing, large and round, like a comfortable pin-cushion,

behind madame's rustic chair ; now arranging the folds of her silk dress so as to save it from contact with the vulgar earth ; and again congratulating the Abbé on the charming effect of their joint nursing upon mademoiselle. Such was the way of bonnes. The Marquis, grand, courteous, but absent, took his chocolate in silence. So gathered the group on that evening on the great terrace at Boisfontaine.

While they, unconscious, spoke, and moved, and looked, other eyes, of which they knew not, were watching them with no friendly gaze. Maître Grimeau saw them from a distant window in a distant angle of the Château ; and his eye was evil. Others beheld them, too ; notably one of the six, who, instead of feeling grateful that his crime of killing monsieur's hares had, through monsieur's clemency (as explained by Grimeau, surintendant), been commuted from the galleys to drawing a little water every day, in company with others, felt the

soul of a human being stir within him as time went on ; and with it the knowledge of wrong and shame. There was another evil eye that day, in another part of the Castle, which was also at that moment fixed upon the group on the terrace. It was the one available eye of Jacques Duclôt, eldest and promising son of the worst man in Boisfontaine — the village blacksmith. He had brains, this Jacques Duclôt, and a naturally coarse and vulgar nature. In his trade he was a marvel of ingenuity and cleverness. He had been always employed about the Castle since he was a growing lad, and had become skilled in all the finer kinds of work of his calling.

At this moment Jacques was repairing the lock of a door in one of the tourelles, opening on to a staircase which led up to monsieur's apartments. He was a sallow-faced, broad-featured, grimy man, naturally dirty ; his one eye black and extraordinarily keen and piercing ; and he wore a short-

cropped shock of rusty black hair. He was at this time about five-and-twenty, and his skill made him rich. He had plenty of employment, and worked for all the neighbouring seigneurs and others for miles round. His manners—what he had of them—were rough, not to say rude.

It was Jacques Duclôt, then, who thus evilly eyed askance the group on the terrace. As he looked, he became filled with envy, hatred, and malice—not for the first time. He had always, and naturally, hated those above him. He had never forgotten how, when both were children, Monsieur de Salis had found him inside the park gate, and had beaten him like a dog. He was, indeed, the last man to forget such a thing, such degradation, or to forgive it. But if Armand de Salis had been a saint, such as he had been told that *mademoiselle*, for example, was, it was all the same in the nature of Jacques to hate everything greater or better than himself;

which, indeed, is tantamount to saying that he hated the whole world. There were such people, then.

Jacques Duclôt, as we said, looked out from behind the turret-door, where he was quietly and cleverly inspecting a lock, so old and elaborate in construction that it taxed his knowledge to the utmost. ‘It is useless—useless—useless,’ he kept saying to himself, with a kind of chuckle. But it had taxed his ingenuity all the same—given him, in short, a little trouble; and he was too good a workman to be satisfied with patches and scamped labour. He took out the screws one by one, and took in the scene under the great beech-tree on the terrace at the same time. Lock-making had become an art since the King took it up; and the aim of Jacques Duclôt was to be a locksmith in Paris. He designed to apply for the interest of the Marquis to attain his ambition. As he turned his clever, wicked eye from the lock to the high-bred personages on the

greensward outside, there can be no doubt that Jacques envied them, to begin with. He was far too intelligent not to appreciate, after his fashion, and to envy the beauty of these people whom he hated ; their grace, their courtesy, their superb air of breeding. But when, for example, he saw the Marquis give his Sèvres cup to the valet who waited upon him, Jacques would have liked to rush upon them, fling the fragile porcelain to the ground, and destroy and devastate amongst the silver and china, and everything delicate and beautiful there. But he would, notwithstanding, have liked to be capable of such grandeur, and to wear such fine clothes. Also, had Jacques been lord of Boisfontaine, and Monsieur le Marquis and those others his dependents, with what an iron heel would he have ground them down, and with what rigour should they have been made to serve him ! Entertaining such ideas as these, and stung by the thought that he could no more be as these people

than they could be as he was, malice added its poison to hatred in his breast ; and vows, by no means new to it, arose, that, when the time should come, which was every day drawing nearer, the people acting there—breathing, living, swelling with pride and hauteur before his eyes—should hear of Jacques Duclôt, and see him, too, in a way they little dreamed of. He had eaten of monsieur's salt—true, and paid for the King's. He had also eaten more than once of monsieur's hares, his rabbits, his little partridges—nay, of his fine venison pretty often. He had once been nearly caught—Grimeau, wretch ! pig ! had been aware of it, and Duclôt père had saved him from a fate which, even at this time, made him break into a cold perspiration to think of. Well, there were old scores to pay off in more directions than one ; and Jacques hugged himself, with the certainty that the man with brains could make his opportunity and pay them to the last

mite. As he came to this conclusion, the lock came away into his hands; and he again looked out of the turret-door, watching his opportunity to emerge at such a moment as not to obtrude his grimy apron and shock head on the eyes of the grand company. At the same moment a movement was taking place amongst them. Madame felt a slight chillness in the air; monsieur rose to escort her indoors. The Abbé remained in company with Catullus. The valet took indoors the silver and the china, and the bonne followed with madame's *négligé* fan and other trifles. It was then that Monsieur de Vezécque, pleading with madame his immediate departure for foreign service, obtained the indulgence—within limits—of seeing, under mademoiselle's guidance, the famous parterres of Boisfontaine.

‘So that is mademoiselle!’ muttered Jacques, as she turned with her fiancé to leave the terrace. ‘That is the girl whom

Dorine—scélérate Dorine!—hated with her heart's blood!—a true-bred daughter of Boisfontaine—sister of De Salis! She looks meek; but, at the same time, grand enough. Dorine'—and he ground his teeth—'thou and I might have been as yonder fiancées. Body and soul, Dorine, thou art to me now as nothing. Yet I hate with thy hate, even now. That is thy legacy!'

Meantime, we must follow our heroine and her betrothed. Their conversation—indeed, their whole interview—was so unlike the conventional idea of such interviews, that it would have much astonished madame, who would certainly not have comprehended it at all.

'Mademoiselle will have heard that I am bound to return to America?'

'Yes,' said Toinette quietly. 'And when?'

'I leave Paris in three days; so soon as I have my despatches for De Montcalme,

and have taken leave of the King and Queen, for which I go to Compiègne.'

'And you serve, then, Monsieur de la Fayette?'

'But, yes! Such a general! Such a cause! The Queen herself, much as she disapproved of our joining in the war—even she admires La Fayette, as who would not? She breathes only enthusiasm—energy! She would have France awake from the sleep of age, and become young, vigorous! She adores liberty—freedom; the cause of the weak against the strong.'

Antoinette looked up. She liked the sound of these words. 'The weak against the strong—freedom—liberty!' They had an English ring about them. And Toinette only knew a little. She was young, and had, as yet, no politics. Her heart rose to her lips; her eyes shone.

'Liberty!' she said, with a sort of sobbing sigh. And then, with an exquisite modest grace, as if she wished to learn, and

thought that he could teach her, she said, 'I have something to ask of monsieur.'

The Marquis looked round. Her eyes were raised inquiringly to his face. They were beautiful eyes, clear and true, yet soft with the soul of womanhood ; and monsieur, who had come here on the merest duty, began to feel that he should like to stay to learn the mind and ways of this fair young betrothed, so spotless from the world, so wise. She, it seemed, wanted to learn ; he thought he knew. His soul was ablaze with the new aspirations, wrapped in the new phrases, of that new age.

'Will mademoiselle, then, ask ? I shall be too happy to reply.'

'How is it, monsieur, that the poor in our country know so little of this liberty which you, and the heroes who fight with you, are giving to a foreign race in a foreign country ? Why is it that the seigneurs—such men as my father, for example—are hated amongst their people ? If we wish

them well, and desire their good, why do they hate us? If not——'

The Marquis drew himself together. This was a hard question. No flattering phrase about the goodness of monsieur, or the amiability of madame, would answer it. No evasive compliment to herself would deceive those questioning eyes, hungry for the truth. He did not know how to answer them. At length he said :

'It is the spirit of the age. It is, without doubt, a bad age, seeking for change—restless. It is also the weak rising against the strong; the wronged (in the case of England) against the oppressor. In America we are, for our part, helping the weak to resist the strong. Oh, Liberty! thy cause is glorious!' finished the Marquis, with a touch of the rhapsody then considered so exalting.

'If that will bring good to the poor?' said Toinette, in a questioning voice. 'If that, at least, is to come out of all the changes?'

‘Liberty! Life! Freedom! These are La Fayette’s watchwords! They are mine! They shall one day—who knows?—be the watchwords of France!’

‘How happy that sounds!’ cried Toinette. ‘And how grand!’ But again reverting to the old difficulty, ‘These poor people around us—at our doors, monsieur—what is for them? There is wrong—so great, so terrible! There is suffering, so sad! I cannot cease to think of it. Can your La Fayette, who is also a great seigneur—can he fight far off for another people, and forget to help his own?’

She then, excited on her part, told her listener some of the incidents of her own experience.

But De Vezécque could not at all enter into details such as these. It was like calling a hawk from the high heavens to its perch on the hand. His head was in the air. He was following, mentally, the brilliant pathway of the meteors of the

hour, who were flashing and dazzling round the pole-star of Liberty. He was not able to discern the true from the false ; but, at least, his aim was high, and his gaze upward.

‘ Ah !’ he exclaimed, his grave face kindling as he spoke ; ‘ in the golden days that are coming, all things will be changed. Peace and plenty, equal taxation, the rich bearing the burdens of the poor, and the poor those of each other. Glorious days ! exalted destiny ! It shall be ours to break these chains of slavery, to make ourselves one with our people !’

Antoinette listened. She wished to learn. She saw that De Vezécque was sincere. She blamed herself that, for her part, she could not quite understand him.

‘ I should indeed like to know the people. I have earnestly desired it. I have tried,’ she said, in a low, sad voice ; ‘ but——’

She could not help thinking of ‘ the six ;’

of Dorine, and the young girl, her sister ; of Grimeau ; of others whom she had seen about the demesne, and whose sinister looks and obeisances she dreaded to encounter. She would have liked to spend and be spent for them ; to help, to raise, to make life happy to them. But to be one with them, as monsieur put it (she was aristocrat all over, this Toinette)—she could not, as yet, follow him so high ; or, perhaps, stoop so low. She could not quite say, ‘To make ourselves one with them.’ There was a great distinction, she remembered, between Miller Matthison and Sir Geoffrey Leigh, as between Dames Brown, Johnson, and Smith, and the beautiful old Dowager and Aunt Marguerite — a distinction which neither would desire to alter ; a distinction which in no wise lessened the love on both sides. After a little pause, she said in a modest tone :

‘But, monsieur, that so glorious day is not as yet arrived ! What, then, can I

myself do to aid the cause of liberty amongst the people?—to help in any way the suffering, the miserable, whom every day I see, and who groan and faint just outside our gates, just over our fences, just within a step of our house? I may not—indeed, I see for myself that I cannot go—amongst them——’

With great suddenness did monsieur now descend to earth, and betray the aristocrat French noble beneath the Republican vest.

‘Go—amongst them!’ he exclaimed, with a kind of shudder, looking at her with eyes ablaze, and involuntarily stretching his arm round her with a protecting, anxious, sheltering impulse. ‘What, amongst these ingrates, these rebels, these traitors, who are almost in arms against us! Nay, I beseech, I warn, I pray of mademoiselle on my knees to restrain her too generous goodness. Alas! my time is but too short; and I am, as mademoiselle sees, a plain man. I know

little of courtly phrases ; but I take it upon me to use the position in which I have the great happiness to find myself to offer advice, which I implore of mademoiselle to accept.'

'Certainly ; with all my heart. I wish but to be guided.'

'Then remember that outside these gates are enemies. There is danger, actual danger, abroad. There is impossibility of confidence or of mutual trust. When I came here last night, it was, to be plain, from a conviction that honour and duty bade me come. I glory in my profession—I adore my general ; I longed only to return to these. To-day I have learned that in leaving France I leave my happiness behind me. And the idea that my betrothed wife is here, and the state of affairs what I have but lately realized it to be, will sadly and entirely destroy the life that is before me, until I can return with honour and a free conscience to claim her. I pray you, then, for your

sake and mine, to keep away from the degraded peasantry of this our country, until they and we shall be on more equal terms. That day will come to France. We shall return from yonder emancipated land with the star-spangled banner in our hands ! It shall wave side by side with the oriflamme of France ! We will advocate new laws, and teach the abrogation of the old ! We shall, fear not, bring back golden days to our country !

‘ Ah, monsieur !’ said Antoinette ; ‘ if only these new times would make haste to save the poor ! This winter, how much misery there is for them yet to suffer !’

‘ Yes—yes,’ said De Vezécque ; ‘ these things will come with time—time. But we must be patient ; the King desires only the happiness of his people—the Queen is with us ! In that reign of Plenty, Toleration, and Peace, the sun of France shall shine upon a new world—a regeneration of the old !’

Thus spoke the Marquis, with upraised eyes and clasped hands ; Toinette trying to soar after him, but not quite educated up to the perfect standard as yet.

Suddenly he turned round to her with a fresh emotion of recoil :

‘ But once more,’ he said, taking her hand as she listened, endeavouring to follow him in his flight, with her earnest eyes fixed upon his face, ‘ once more I say it, the ground here is strewn with gins and snares ! How terrible is this knowledge to me, now that I go ! We stand here in France on a volcano, and I leave you here !’

‘ With my parents,’ said Antoinette.

‘ You are right, dear mademoiselle. But for me, I am torn two ways. Duty, which was heretofore my sole aim, looks, ah ! how cold ! how stern ! as she beckons me across the sea. Happiness, which I now know to be in France, is—here !’

‘ But,’ said Toinette, with a demure smile, ‘ if monsieur should fail to follow duty

across the seas, who, then, should bring back the banner of Liberty, of which he spoke but now—the starry banner ?

Monsieur did not see the grave humour of the remark, but he gave a gesticulation suggestive of mingled despair and resolution, and then said :

‘Do not, then, forget the last injunction I would leave with my affianced bride. It is made in no narrow spirit, but on mature knowledge. Avoid the canaille. They are utterly to be avoided—they. It would but be trailing the white robes of an angel in the mire of vile earth, to intermingle with them.’

As he said this in a voice raised somewhat above its natural pitch by anxiety, and speaking with an energy amounting to command, they turned into a side alley of the garden, which led eventually to the grand terrace, and confronted suddenly, face to face, a large-limbed, sallow-faced, grimy man with one eye, shouldering a basket filled

with iron tools. A rough, uncouth man, not given to paying homages, he paid none now ; but, in spite of himself, a glance of the eye from Monsieur de Vezécque, a soldier, accustomed to command men, made him press backward toward the hedge—almost into it, in fact—so as to allow mademoiselle to pass. Perhaps also because there was power in that glance of the eye, Jacques Duclôt did not begin to curse until they were well out of hearing. Nevertheless, as they approached the bend in the walk, monsieur, looking back, saw a clenched hand waving wildly above that shock head of rusty black hair. It was shaken in a threatening manner towards himself and his bride-elect.

‘Who is that—that man au diable who passed us?’ asked De Vezécque, in a stern voice, all the instincts of the soldier and the aristocrat bristling in arms at the insolence of this sans-culotte.

‘I do not know his name, but his looks are terrible, is it not so?’ said Toinette, with

an involuntary shudder. ‘He is a blacksmith, and he is often employed here. He is what you call a genius, a man skilled in his craft beyond the common, I have heard. Did he hear us but now, talking?’

‘I know not,’ said De Vezécque, ‘and but for your sake I should not care. It again enforces upon me to say to mademoiselle, with all earnestness, “Trust not, have no dealings with those scoundrel canaille who prowl like wolves beyond these gates.”’

So ended this tête-à-tête. And not without its fruits. In the mind of Antoinette had grown a sense of relief; she had found her unknown betrothed a man of a good heart, and with aspirations of the highest. Antoinette, indeed, felt that his flights and aims were at present beyond her comprehension; but in her youth and modesty she believed that the shortcomings were her own. At any rate, she could look up, and regard him as her superior both in age and

knowledge ; and that, to Antoinette, was —for the present—rest.

With regard to De Vezécque, he was fascinated and surprised. The beauty of Antoinette he admired ; but he had sufficient intelligence to see beyond that, into the charming nature, the frank, pure soul which was more lovely than the outward shape it wore. Her little air of confidence, her trusting acquiescence, her belief in the wisdom of his theories, the very absence of all coquettish airs and graces—her extreme simplicity, in short, greatly attracted him. Nay, more—his impulsive nature, full of ardour and of enthusiasm, from henceforth devoted itself to this new idol. It was a test of his principles, such as he had never even imagined, that he should resist the overpowering thought that it would be sweet indeed to throw up glory, the fight for freedom, the grand future, yes, everything but honour, to stay in France with Toinette. Everything but honour. That

remained. The temptation was over. He turned from the idea, and, filled with regrets, and with a new and deep devotion, the Marquis de Vezécque left Boisfontaine on the following day.






Part III.

LIFE AT VERSAILLES.





CHAPTER XXV.

T was the beginning of January, 1789. The Court of France was gay this winter. Gay and splendid for the last time. True, there was famine abroad, and want, and the extremest rigour of a most rigorous winter, in addition. But it was also necessary to keep up appearances—to fascinate and dazzle the public eye. It was to be hoped that expenditure in high places might, at least indirectly, benefit those in low places. At all events, it was imperative to do something. An entire Court (wholly incapable of appreciating the situation) could not be kept dangling in ‘undress,’

that is, in everyday commonplace monotony, with Monsieur Necker and his successors going and coming as the one excitement of the time. 'Affaires' were dreariness embodied, eminently for and of the people. The Court must do something pour s'amuser. The Queen was dying of low spirits, so said her attendants. She, at least, would relish a little gaiety. The King made it his pleasure to insist that there should be small private balls given once a fortnight for the Queen. That was truly beneficent, and truly wise. It was also truly amiable, and like the King's goodness. It was, finally, truly sympathetic to most people. It was at one of these balls that Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine was to dance her first minuet. She had had the best teaching from the Court dancing-master; and though a few months ago she would have trembled and felt shy at the ordeal before her, she had outgrown much of that shyness, and the tremor which it brings. The apartments which the Marquise de

Boisfontaine had, in her official capacity, at Versailles, were filled this evening with a select throng of friends and acquaintances. Some curious, some interested in the début of the daughter of so ancient a house, prominent in every reign amongst the noblesse, and especially so in this. Monsieur de Salis was there, also the young lady who had the misfortune to be betrothed to him—a demoiselle not quite his equal in point of birth, as a somewhat provincial, but highly-respectable, father and mother (also present) testified, but whose fortune amply balanced any other shortcomings. Monsieur le Marquis was there, also. And as all these stood, or sat, ate bonbons, and took chocolate, the door between the rooms was opened, the curtains behind it drawn, and those who were so inclined might enter and see Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine, dressed in a robe of white and silver brocade, with a white satin petticoat, hoop, and Court train, her hair raised from her forehead, and

slightly powdered, a wreath of small roses (arranged by no less an authority than Mademoiselle Bertin herself) placed daintily over the left ear, and a tiny necklet of the same round her throat, while ruffles of rich lace fell to her elbows. Madame her mother was at that moment engaged in fastening a large single diamond into each of Toinette's little pink ears with her own hands.

Great admiration was both audible and visible, so far as perfect breeding allowed ; and Toinette's cheeks, hitherto pale, grew rosy with pleasure when her father came forward and she saw that he looked both pleased and satisfied with her. All the gay company then moved on towards the Queen's salon, where they ranged themselves in various groups, waiting for the arrival of royalty.

It was a brilliant scene, and to Antoinette's young and unaccustomed eyes it seemed like fairyland. The thousand wax-lights flashing and multiplying in the great mirrors,

the floors parquettèd and polished until they too, reflected the lights, the gay dresses and the shadows of the dancers. There were the royal pages in their red velvet and gold lace, flitting about and attending to the guests; there were Monsieur and Madame with their entourage, and the Comte d'Artois and his wife—a little clipped as to glory, perhaps, since the birth of the King's sons, and not ignorant of that fact. All handsome, vain, selfish, dissolute, and incapable of aiding King or country in the evil day. There, too, for the first and last time, Antoinette saw the man whom her father's loyal heart hated from its depths, with the unerring instinct of the true against the false, the Duc d'Orleans. Politically, not yet, perhaps, quite so black as ultra-royalists believed him to be; but in his private life wicked, profligate, irreligious, false. The easy-going tool of designing men, who would have used his unquestionable abilities to their ends, but found him at last

false even to them. He stood just now in the midst of a brilliant group, talking to the Comtesse de Provence, his handsome face and figure conspicuous even there. But the countenance was roué and repellant in expression, and his whole air a mixture of haughty, contemptuous indifference, with a restless, wary look in the eyes, which seemed to say that the scene and its surroundings were uncongenial, and he inimical to them.

At this moment the closed doors at the end of the salon were thrown open; there was a stir amongst the company, and grooms and ushers of the royal chamber announced the Queen. A buzz of pleasure and admiration told the interest which her presence excited, as well it might. Taller than any of her attendants—‘like Calypso among her nymphs’—her head erect, her proud carriage and queenly air unmistakably marking her—she advanced into the room, followed by a train of ladies, amongst whom were the Duchesse Jules de Polignac, the Princess

de Chimay, the Marquise de Boissfontaine, Madame d'Ossun, and many other lovely and high-born women—a bevy of beauty. Full (though not State) dress was worn, as to-night there were a number of foreign guests from the different embassies. Antoinette watched the Duc d'Orleans as the Queen entered. A dark scowl passed over his face, to be instantly merged in the air of well-bred insolence which was characteristic of him. He advanced towards the Queen, and performed the usual courtly obeisance, using the privilege of his relationship to compliment her on her appearance and her toilette; and having complied with the exigencies of his position, he retired to the card-tables in the adjoining room, where Antoinette lost sight of him. The Queen herself danced with Monsieur, and the princes and princesses of the blood royal amongst themselves. Some figures were danced by the gentlemen in their plumed and laced hats, which had a gay and striking appear-

ance; and Antoinette, looking on with observant eyes, thought how magnificent it all was.

At last, however—all too soon, she felt—the floor was clear of dancers, and she was invited forward. The whole of this grand and stately company was looking on, none more interested than the Queen herself. And, truly, it was a somewhat formidable ordeal for any young girl to pass through. But there was about Antoinette something out of the ordinary, an attraction not easy to describe. Other young ladies there were about the Court, some of whom were quite as handsome, and far more used to the ways of life; quite conscious, moreover, of their individual share of beauty, or rank, or other advantages, of which they were early taught to make the most. But she to her youth added a modest self-possession—a sort of grave innocence of look—which was rare, and of itself a charm. The Queen, always inclined

to do and say gracious things, and interested in all the young and untried débutantes whom she delighted to gather round her, herself spoke to Toinette, and praised her dancing, recalling her own first minuet, danced just after her marriage, before the late King.

‘I was nervous,’ she said, smiling graciously ; ‘and I was younger even than you are, mademoiselle my namesake ; and I confess that I did not dance it so well—that first minuet.’

Antoinette looked upward as she rose from her curtsy, and saw the Queen’s smile, and felt at that moment a thrill of her mother’s enthusiasm. The next instant, the Queen had moved past her, and she found herself surrounded by friends and congratulators. Presently her father came to her, and said that the King wished Antoinette to be presented to him. His Majesty was then talking to the Duke of Dorset (whom she knew by name as a rela-

tion of the Leighs), and again Antoinette had to make her curtsy ; and very pretty she looked in the silver brocade, with her little air of grave reverence, as the English Ambassador did not fail to perceive, pleasing her very much by claiming kinship with her, and by addressing her in his own language. Later in the evening, as she was looking on with continued interest at the brilliant scene before her, a gentleman was introduced to her, evidently at his own request.

‘ I see that I must use my passport of admission to the honour of your acquaintance, mademoiselle,’ were his first words, spoken in English. ‘ I am able to tell you that I know the Ladies Leigh ; and that I am in the train of Lord Dorset, who is already, amongst so many others, your admirer as well as your kinsman.’ Antoinette’s start of pleasure as she heard the familiar English tongue, and her heightened colour and pleased smile, were charming to

see. The walls of the royal ballroom, its lights, its mirrors, its rich hangings, seemed to vanish. For one dreamy moment she stood in the parlour at Leigh : the beautiful old grandmother, the aunt who had loved her so much, were there, and Geoffrey standing in the doorway, his face aglow with exercise and adventure. It was almost too much. He spoke again. ‘I am the bearer of many kind greetings ; in fact, I am charged with a direct mission. I must tell you that Geoffrey Leigh and I were at Eton together ; and, as we always keep up our old friendship, I was, only a few weeks ago, spending a delightful time with him and all the dear people there. I was then strictly enjoined to endeavour to find out when Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine was to make her *début*, to attend the ball at which her minuet was to be danced, and to send a full and (if I could) impartial account to the Ladies Leigh.’

This little incident was a great pleasure

to Antoinette, who did not disguise the fact ; and her readiness to converse with the good-looking Englishman attracted the more notice that she was herself the observed of all observers to-night. The evening was now advanced ; and the King, who liked routine and early hours, retired. The company, of course, remained as long as the Queen stayed ; but she also at length withdrew, and the rooms were quickly emptied.

‘Au revoir, mademoiselle,’ said Antoinette’s English acquaintance.

‘Good-night, sir,’ she said, in English. ‘I am glad of this pleasant interview, and I shall hope to see you again.’

‘Anglaise ! Conceive it !’ said an old and high-born dowager, who was passing. ‘Intrigante already, and so young ! Bah !’ she continued, addressing the daughter nearest to her. ‘English ! I am thankful that none of *us* speak that wicked tongue. It is the language of enemies—and of Pitt !’

‘And of Franklin,’ said the daughter, who silently worshipped Montcalme, La Fayette, and the new opinions. ‘Better so than vegetate, and know nothing. Those English have wings; they can fly outside their fogs and their perfidious island. We—we remain.’

‘We of the haute noblesse of France,’ said the dowager, with inexpressible grandeur of deportment, ‘are—altogether different. Say nothing until after next month, when you are married, and have the tabouret. You will then learn to know your place, foolish; and you will see your American Wickednesses—your Montcalme, your La Fayette, your Franklin—in their true light! Bah! Au diable with your Pitt and your English! Fie, then!’





CHAPTER XXVI.



S Antoinette waited rather anxiously for her mother, who had followed the Queen to her apartments, she received a hasty summons to join her immediately, and was conducted by one of the royal pages into an antechamber, where, standing by the fire, she saw Madame de Boisfontaine very radiant and smiling.

‘Toinette,’ she said, ‘the Queen sups just now in her private salon, and has commanded me to say that she wishes you to join her. This, my daughter, is a great honour, and but seldom offered to a débutante ; for conversation is unrestrained,

and only those who can be trusted to repeat nothing outside are admitted there.'

When the mother and daughter entered the small room where this select coterie was gathered, they found most of the invited few assembled. A bright fire of wood and charcoal glowed on the hearth ; curtains of thick lined velvet were drawn over the doors ; and a few wax-lights, burning behind rose-coloured shades, gave out a subdued brilliance, very pleasant to the eyes, and very becoming to the company. Antoinette's glance naturally first sought the Queen. It was scarcely half an hour since Marie Antoinette had quitted the ball-room in full dress. This she had laid aside, notwithstanding certain unmistakable signs, well known to her Majesty, in the demeanour of the Duchesse de Noailles, whose instincts (however irritatingly manifested), we cannot doubt, were correct according to her lights. Madame de Noailles could never be made, either by love or fear, to see that there was

anything but harm in casting aside those little formalities of dress and etiquette which were so burdensome to royalty. ‘What,’ she would say to Madame Campan, or others in office about the Queen—‘what would a rose be without its leaves and its thorns?’ And she could not now, this evening, be coaxed into approval. ‘There were two, if not three, foreigners invited to the petit souper. Two, at least, were English. It was a solecism, that hoopless petticoat! The Queen looked adorable in this undress costume, true; nevertheless, it was certainly a solecism.’ So groaned Madame de Noailles. Meantime, Antoinette saw only the Queen, who was seated in a large fauteuil, looking somewhat fatigued by the evening’s gaiety. She wore a sort of loose dress with sleeves to the elbow, made of pink satin, quilted inside with silk, and embroidered in gold thread. This was fastened at the throat, across the bosom and at the waist with clasps of gold filigree,

and thence it opened to the feet, showing the rich petticoat, which was part of the dress which she had just laid aside. Antoinette had looked on her with admiration, mixed with awe, as the grandest, as well as the most beautiful personage in the ball-room. But she thought her still more fascinating now, as she sat with her hand on the arm of the chair, with an air of languor and lassitude about her, looking more the lovable, charming woman than the stately Queen. She beckoned Toinette to her side, and talked to her as charming queens have the privilege of talking, making a few kind words go very far towards the winning of warm young hearts. She then turned partly round towards one of her ladies, and asked why the Earl of Whitworth was not present, and whether his invitation had been given before he had left the palace. As the Queen spoke, a scratch upon the door announced one of the royal pages, who, on being told to enter, lifted

aside the heavy velvet hangings, and ushered in the Comte d'Artois, Comte Fersen, Lord Whitworth himself, and one or two other guests.

Conversation became general ; and, as the Queen—who from habit and inclination was a delicate and simple eater—rose from her slice of chicken and goblet of water from her favourite well at Ville d'Avray, she herself joined in it without ceremony or restraint.

These small gatherings were the delight of Marie Antoinette, who, because there was a spice of inexpediency, to say the least about them, sacrificed much—even to her prudence and her popularity—to their enjoyment. At the same time, such is human nature, that she—whom those who knew her most intimately have emphatically declared innocent of all but the unwisdom of imprudence—gathered together these élite to her intimate society, she was, in truth, every inch, daughter of Austria and Queen of France. And we may be sure that had

this much of freedom in her choice of society been suggested to her from without, instead of originating as a delightful novelty in her own love of pleasure, and her determination to enjoy it after her own fashion, she would have resisted the innovation with all the energy of her nature.

The topic just now was the brown cloth coat and unpowdered hair of Mr. Franklin.

‘Ah,’ said the Queen, ‘I have always my doubts upon that subject. It was new, so we in France adored it. But when I at the first opposed the going out to join those English rebels in America of such men as Monsieur de Montcalme and Monsieur de la Fayette, I, at least, did one good and one right thing in my life, let my enemies say what they will.’

‘Madame is not just,’ said the Comte d’Artois, with his fine air. ‘As well might the rose single out one perfumed day from the rest, when all are equally laden with sweetness.’

With a smile and a wave of her fan, the Queen turned to Lord Whitworth, saying :

‘Is not this so—that in England these men are called by their right names—they are “rebels?”’

‘That is truly the right word, madame ; and we believe that to side with them is disloyal to the country and to the Throne.’

‘To the Throne. That is it,’ said the Queen. ‘But the English are at heart a loyal people ; and these rebels are a long way off, with the sea between. Is it not so? Here, things are less happy. There is no sea between us—and—our’—the Queen paused, her smile faded, her lips quivered, and a pale, gray, sad look came over her face as she added, in a low, distinct voice, ‘our Fate!’

There was silence for a moment ; it fell on the gay company almost as the silence of death. It was at length broken by Madame de Polignac, who bent forward and said something in a low voice in the Queen’s ear.

‘Ah,’ said Marie Antoinette, recovering herself, ‘you are right, chérie. Let us be gay whilst we can. We will sit round the fire, like bons bourgeois, and have proverbs.’

It was a typical scene, and a typical party ! Monsieur, who had joined them, and the rest of the princes and nobles present, in their full dress ; the ladies without their trains, some standing, some invited to sit, some leaning on the Queen’s chair ; and she herself in the midst, as gay as the youngest and gayest among them. The results of the game were by no means ceremonious, if even respectful ; and the Queen’s name was mixed with that of the Comte d’Artois, and even with those of the English guests, in the most haphazard way, causing much merriment and sparkling badinage, that carried with it all the wit and charm of French sociability. Looking on from behind the group of high-born ladies clustering round the royal chair, and joining like children in the spirit of the game, Antoinette noticed

one wistful face, with the eyes fixed entirely on the Queen, and seeing no other. This was Madame Campan, her first lady ; who, though of the Queen's immediate service, had friends and interests outside that charmed circle, and who, whilst she knew to demonstration that the pleasure-loving Queen never would pass, and never had overstepped, the limits of a strict propriety, knew also that those limits were placed only by herself, and were too confidingly narrowed in such a company as the present. And in her loyal heart she followed every smile, word, look, and gesture of the royal mistress whom she so loved with a keen and true appreciation of its consequence. She knew intimately the natures of those who surrounded the Queen of France, and said (perhaps thought) that they adored her. There was Madame Jules de Polignac, now governess of the children of France, and duchess—soft, sweet, fair, gracious, if not actually greedy for herself, forced by the

very pliancy of her nature to be grasping for others. There was Madame d'Ossun, not unworthy of the royal trust; Madame de Lamballe, fairest, truest, most unselfish of them all; and many another gathered there, all friends and favoured guests, and trusted companions now, but some of whom were so soon to forsake her whom they that day professed to love. Madame Campan knew them, one and all.

As the laugh and jest went round, and the game grew to its height, a sound of scratching was again heard on the panel of the door, twice, the second time quickly following upon the first, and louder. One of the Queen's gentlemen opened it, and as he did so a blast of intensest cold rushed into the room and blew the flame upon the hearth, chilling all the company and making the Queen draw the folds of an ermine mantle across her shoulders with a start. For it was indeed a terrible winter, this of 1788-9; the vast halls and corridors of Versailles,

with all their rich draperies and warm fires, could not keep its rude blasts altogether beyond the walls.

After a moment's parley, the gentleman-usher returned to the Queen, saying that it was the last news from Paris, brought by a messenger, with a private letter. There was an immediate rustle of silks and velvet, and the hush of interested attention.

‘Who brings them?’ inquired the Queen.

‘Monsieur de Brissac, your Majesty.’

‘Let him enter.’

There was a slight pause and bustle in the gallery without, and there entered a tall, handsome man in the splendid uniform of the Body Guards — blue coat, crimson breeches, and the stockings laced partly with silver and partly with gold. He stood outside the immediate circle, waiting the Queen's command. Impatiently anxious for news, she asked at once for the main facts, whilst Madame de Lamballe opened and handed her the letter.

‘There is no great news, madame,’ said the captain of the gate : ‘only that Monsieur Moustier has sailed, and Monsieur de la Fayette has returned this day to Paris. The letter is through his hands from Monsieur le Marquis de Montcalme. There has been fighting, and we have the honours.’

‘Moustier—La Fayette!’ said the Queen. ‘One going to represent us in America, the other to represent America here. Trouble follows in their footsteps, both ways, I doubt not. La Fayette,’ she added with incautious bitterness, ‘calls himself a champion of Liberty, and he is a French noble, whose sword should be his King’s. He brings his valise home filled with fireworks and gunpowder, wherewith to dazzle the “Sovereign People,” and to burn himself and us. I know his ambitious spirit, his vanity, his folly. Let us forget him and all connected with him, for to-night at least.’

The Queen laid aside De Montcalme’s letter, unread ; and Monsieur, opening the

gazette, recited some verses in honour of her Majesty in order to restore the unpolitical and festive character of the evening, with all the air of a doctor desirous to offer a *bonne bouche*, by way of sweetening the taste of a glass of medicine. The Queen smiled, and, taking the paper from his hand, proceeded to read them for herself; and then, casting her eye over the printed pages, suddenly gave a little cry as of one stung all at once by some poisonous insect. Her colour came and went, she gave a deep sigh, and then, putting a strong constraint upon herself, turned to the company, and taking leave of them with a stately bend of her head, withdrew at once into her apartments, desiring Madame de Lamballe to plead illness for her.

No sooner was she alone, with the two or three ladies whose office permitted them to follow her, than the unhappy Queen threw herself into a chair, burst into a passion of tears, and flung the gazette, which she had

brought away with her, to the ground, as if its very touch was venom. When her passion had somewhat exhausted itself, she sat up, and, with the gracious courtesy so natural to her, said :

‘ I grieve, I distress my best friends. But—is it not so ? Turn where I will, read where I will, I see, I hear, that to me so hateful word, “ l’Autrichienne ! ”—the source of so many tears, so much grief ! What ! I Austrian ! I, who love only France ! who glory in France ! who am the wife of the King, and mother of the Dauphin ! What is there for me in life if I am not French ! My home, my interests, my husband, my children—are they, then, not French ! But what avails it thus to weep—— ?

As the Queen said these words, she gathered herself together with a gesture truly royal, adding :

‘ My courage at least must remain. Death, I have long said it, is before me.

I know, alas ! whither this terrible force of enmity is pushing me. Be it so. I am not the first of my house who has died at the post of duty. If I must die, it shall at least be as a queen !

Here the sobs of her attendants, unable to suppress their emotion, recalled her to herself.

‘ But is it not like—is it not, indeed, of a piece with all else ?’ she said, in a calmer voice ; ‘ that paper there, pretending forsooth to condemn that so detestable title, invented by bitter enemies, yet quotes—to bring it forward, to familiarize the people with its odious refrain—“l’Autrichienne, toujours l’Autrichienne.” *She* robs the treasury ! *She* starves the people ! *She* rules the King ! Good heavens ! I—I that have all my life escaped the snare of political influence, and kept my woman’s fingers from the touch of power ! *I* have dismissed Monsieur Necker, omitted to honour his wife, or to propitiate his so

wonderful daughter! *I* have deprived Toulouse of its prelate, and persuaded the King to appoint Monsieur de Sens to the head of affairs. Yes, his fate, too, is sealed. The Queen has named him; the country rejects him! Enough! Oh, my King, my husband!" she continued, in a voice of pathetic sadness. "Could I but infuse into your good heart, honest, upright, but, alas! so cold, one spark of the fire that burns in mine, neither Turgot, Necker, Sens, nor any other, should gather up and grasp the reins of power. The prestige, the honour of the throne, should be secured to the generation which our son shall rule by his father's hand—no other. The King of France, the friend, the father of his people, should take counsel of his own will, and consult no other, as to the means by which France should be made the greatest and most glorious of the kingdoms of the world! Is this a time to wait upon events? Nay, rather to lead them! Woman though I am, I am a

queen, a mother ! I cannot sit at my embroidery and smile. I would strive and fight for my son's inheritance ! We cannot swim with the tide. We must breast it, or perish. It follows, then, that we perish !

She spoke these last words with heightened colour, with her glistening eyes raised, and her hands clasped ; in the passion and enthusiasm of the moment she seemed transported out of herself. Then the light faded from her face, her eyes grew dim with tears again, and fixed themselves on the ground, and with a low, wailing sob, she said :

‘ In vain ! In vain !’

And dismissing her attendants, she desired to be left alone.





CHAPTER XXVII.

ANTOINETTE spent a part of every day with her mother, who was still in attendance at Versailles. To this end she walked from her father's house (which was near the great entrance) properly attended ; or if it snowed or rained, she went in a sedan-chair. Her visits were, of course, so timed as to meet Madame de Boisfontaine when her service for the day was ended. Sometimes she was allowed to be present at the Queen's toilette, a stately ceremony which always had its peculiar interest, not only from the minute etiquette observed, but from the grace, beauty, and

individuality of the Queen ; any service about whose person was eagerly sought for, and who contrived to redeem solemn ceremonies, with their tedious detail, from any charge of dulness. It was at this time that favours were asked, petitions laid before her, cases of trouble brought to her notice, and gladly, eagerly relieved, to the best of her knowledge and ability, by the generous Queen ; and money given with a royal bounty to the needy and starving during this sad and bitter winter, as Toinette could many a time have testified. To herself the Queen often gave a gracious word or smile, and she was made to feel herself noticed whenever she came there.

It chanced one day, as Antoinette was walking alone from the Queen's apartments to those of her mother, that a very unpleasant incident happened to her. She had to pass a small side-door in what she knew to be a room often occupied by the King. It was a private door, and generally

locked from within, as the King's anvil was there, with his globes, half-finished clocks, and other favourite employments, which his Majesty never shared with any but skilled scientists or artisans, and which no one knew anything of except the special servant attending him at such times. No guard or page stood at this door, or nearer to it than the end of the gallery. As Toinette passed by on this particular morning, it suddenly opened: a workman's satchel of tools was roughly and unceremoniously dropped on the floor, with more noise than appeared seemly within those regal precincts. It startled Antoinette so much that she sprang backward a step or two. She heard the King's voice within, saying:—

‘Order him to come to-morrow. I like his work.’

Not wishing to pass the door where the King was evidently employed with his anvil, his tools, and his favourite smiths, she was debating whether to turn back, or wait until

it should be closed, when, to her horror and astonishment, she beheld, standing on the very threshold, the detestable form of Jacques Duclôt, the one-eyed smith of Bois-fontaine. Surprise, and an instinctive dread, kept her silent and motionless. Her whole nature rose in revolt at the sight of this man. He stood immediately on the threshold of the door, which was now closed behind him; and she, transfixed, and just out of sight of the guard, was practically alone. He saw his advantage, and stood forward just so far as to be an obstacle in her way. His grimy, sallow face, his shock of unkempt hair, the one eye, in which all his cleverness and all his malice seemed to combine with a fiendish power, struck her with indescribable horror, while yet she was troubled so to meet anyone from Bois-fontaine.

‘Good-day, our mademoiselle,’ said Duclôt, with a grin, as he instantly took in the situation. ‘The air of Versailles is not so

good as that of little Boisfontaine by the tint of mademoiselle's complexion ! Yes, I, too, am at Versailles ; I serve the King's locksmith. In Paris one everywhere meets one's friends. Au revoir, mademoiselle, for I shall again have this pleasure !

Astonishment at the man's audacity had kept Antoinette silent. That he should address her at all—and here—close to the King's very chamber—here, almost within sight of the guard—here, at Versailles ! Antoinette's nature, however, was not one to sink under such an encounter through fear. As he stooped to take up his tool-basket, and was about to lurch off down the gallery with the self-satisfied gait peculiar to him, her spirit returned to her. She drew herself up, and pointing to the basket, said, with an air of hauteur which became her very well :

‘ Put it down—that basket ; and listen, you !’

With a surprised look, and a docility

quite involuntary, and which he could not in any way have accounted for, he set the basket on the ground, and looking at Antoinette's shining eyes and flushed cheeks, felt much as if a dove had flown in his face.

‘Attend, you!’ she repeated. ‘If I were a man, you would not dare to speak thus. True, I am only mademoiselle; but my father is your seigneur. Beware of addressing me once again. For this time I do not call the guard. I am silent. Go!’

Duclôt, for the first and last time recorded of him, was what we should call taken aback. He slunk away, and the one divine spark left in him admired the spirit of the young girl whom he had intended to terrify, and who had met his insolence so bravely. It was quickly enough extinguished by a rush of intensified hate, which told him that he was an object of horror and loathing to her. He shook with rage as he went down the private staircase adjacent, and, dropping his

panier with a clatter on the marble pavement of the court, was sharply reprimanded by an officer of the guard on duty there, which did not add beneficence to his temper.

With a reticence and self-command little to be looked for in a French demoiselle of that or any other day, Antoinette keep her word. She spoke neither to her mother nor to the marquis. The only allusion she made to the occurrence was in this way : That night, at her coucher, the *bonne* was attending her, and busy, as usual, about the many little offices which she allowed no inferior servant to share, when Antoinette said :

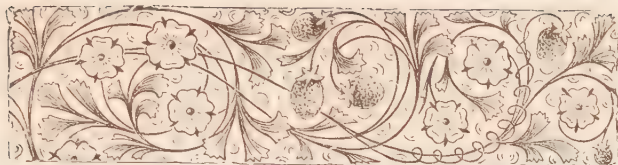
‘ My nurse, do you know that people from Boisfontaine are here, at Versailles ?’

The *bonne* did not at once reply. Finally, she said :


‘ My jewel ! my violet ! these are evil times ! I have in my day heard that Monsieur le Duc d’Orleans, and the Regent, his father, spent much gold and much learning in endeavouring to raise the devil, but

could never quite arrange it. Our good King has outdone them. The devil is here, in the King's own palace. I have myself seen him—I ! Again I say, these are evil days !'





CHAPTER XXVIII.

 TIME marched on apace, and the month of April came. On the surface things were still pretty much the same, but both within and without the Court there was a feeling of distrust, an under-current, which brought along with it an uncomfortable sense of insecurity. The Queen, with a small train of ladies, was at Trianon, probably, though she knew it not, for the last time. Full of delight in the lovely scene, the budding leaves, and the scent of spring in the gardens, she threw off the air of anxiety and trouble which had been apparent in her of late, and seemed

resolved to enjoy at least the passing moment. This mood of the Queen's seemed to find its echo amongst her attendants ; and Toinette, with the rest, was delighted to bask in the sunshine of the present. She lost sight of the fear which haunted her every day at Versailles, that she might again meet the insolent Duclôt, and felt, for the first time for many weeks, light-hearted and at her ease again. Never since has Trianon seen such groups as then haunted in perfect security its green alleys and parterres, or re-echoed voices more musical and happy than it did this day. Antoinette remembered the whole scene long afterwards—the figures, most of them slender and graceful, wearing the long straight dress and muslin cap, each with some favourite flower placed on the knotted muslin handkerchief folded upon the breast, and remembered how quips, and jests, and sparkling nothings amused them all. How they laughed at some mispronunciation of a name by one of the

Savoyard ladies in the train of Madame ; how a sudden breeze blew away some of the pretty caps and such-like trifles. It seemed, on looking back, as if they had been jesting on the edge of a volcano, playing like children among the flowers wherein lurked serpents and all manner of evil things.

It was now almost dusk in some of the shadier walks, and instinctively the ladies began to draw together and approach the favourite pavilion, in which they were sure to find the Queen. Suddenly, without any warning, a piercing shriek rang through the air, thrilling all hearts.

‘ It is the Queen ! the Queen ! Where is the Queen ?

They rushed, a bevy of helpless girls, to the spot whence the sounds seemed to come. Pressing forward, they saw the Queen, perfectly erect, every vestige of colour banished from her face, her eyes bright and flashing with indignation, her whole attitude expressing a proud and angry resolution. On a

rustic seat, Madame de Polignac had fallen in an almost fainting state.

‘Where are my guards?’ said the Queen proudly. ‘How is it that I am subject to these insults? I come here, with my friends, for rest and relaxation, and even here I am persecuted.’

By this time a detachment of the guards, and two or three of the royal pages, some few of the gentlemen about the Queen, the Comte de Provence, and one or two of the English legation, who had just arrived, appeared on the scene. As soon as it was known amongst these that her Majesty had been annoyed by some one hiding in the gardens, a dispersion took place to search the grounds and shrubberies. Meantime, there was a movement towards the house, and everyone gathered round the Queen. But further trouble was in store. Hardly had she entered the vestibule of the pavilion, when a servant in the Versailles livery was seen approaching with a letter in his hand,

which he gave to the Queen's equerry, Monsieur de Sauve Bœuf. Lights were brought, and everyone stood waiting to hear what the contents might be. They fell upon the royal circle like the explosion of a bomb-shell. The Abbé de Vermond wrote praying the Queen to return to Versailles without loss of time. Monsieur de Brienne had written from Paris advices of an outbreak in the Faubourg St. Antoine and other low quarters of the city, which, 'though quite under control and not alarming, was, nevertheless, troublesome, and might be productive of disagreeable eventualities.' A similar despatch had been sent to the King, who was hunting at Fontainebleau. In both letters it was advised that, as so many groups of the disaffected were about on every side, it would be expedient for the scattered Court to re-unite as soon as possible at Versailles.

'Voilà tout!' said the Queen, with a gesture of vexation, entering the hall with a

proud step, half prompt, half unwilling, but devoid of anything like fear. Madame de Polignac, whose nerves this final stroke had completely shattered, hid her face in her hands, and burst into violent weeping. To see anyone in trouble was enough for the Queen, who immediately devoted herself to calm and cheer her friend. The darkness of the late evening now enveloped all the place, and the groves and shrubberies flashed with the light of torches and echoed to the tramp of feet. Presently a message was brought in that a man had been found secreted in the gardens, and the commanding officer asked for the royal orders.

‘Does anyone recognise him?’ inquired the Queen.

‘Yes, Madame. It is the crazy Monsieur Castelnau.’*

‘Again here! After so many warnings,’ said the Queen gravely. ‘It is deeply annoying; it is insufferable; it angers me!’

* See Note C at end of volume.

But'—she paused a moment, and then said, with an air of sudden decision—'it was not Monsieur Castelnau. We all know his harmless craze !' breaking off again with a smile of melancholy pathos, and addressing herself to Monsieur de Sauve Bœuf: 'Let him be released. He would do Marie Antoinette no ill. I could not bear that light and air, the sweets of liberty, should be denied to anyone for my sake. Alas ! who knows how soon the Queen of France herself may sigh for the freedom so dear to all ? But, Monsieur le Marquis, it behoves your men to look more keenly yet. It was no madman who scared us in the bowers of Trianon to-day.'

The captain of the guard bowed, and retired to order stricter search to be made, and the madman, whom the Queen had again pardoned, to be released. Carriages were then announced ; the Queen, with two of her ladies, got into one, and the rest bestowed themselves in the roomy vehicles as

best they might. Antoinette found a place with Madame d'Ossun, who, less bewildered and more mistress of herself than some others, gave her own account of all that had befallen.

‘I was not many paces from the Queen, though not actually in her presence,’ she said. ‘Her Majesty was sitting in the arbour with Madame de Polignac, talking of a thousand things. They had no secrets; I heard her mention her old home in Vienna—the surprising way in which she had forgotten even to regret it, in fact, ever since she had become French. She spoke of her children, as, with Madame la Gouvernante, she so often does. Of Monsieur the late Dauphin; of the rigid etiquette of his entourage, and all she had suffered from it; of her devotion to him, and the very little she was permitted to be with him; of the sweet babe, Madame Sophie, and how often she thought about those two dear angels now in Paradise.

Then turning to Madame de Polignac, the Queen condescended to press her hand, saying kindly, just as I joined them :

“ But now, dear friend, you and I, the mamma and the good governess, we have changed all that.”

‘ Scarcely had the Queen spoken these gracious words, when a harsh, vulgar, threatening voice, quite close behind the arbour, said, almost as if in our very ears :

“ Orléans ! Orléans ! Vive Orléans !
À bas Polignac, Brienne, and all those !”

‘ The panic that fell on us for a moment was like a paralysis. The Queen asserted herself first, and called aloud for help. Madame de Polignac screamed, and then swooned ; I, when I could stir, flew out to see who was there. But the advancing twilight, the confusion, the horror, the unexpected arrival of such a shock in that place, that Eden, where, if anywhere on this earth, the Queen of France might be supposed safe from the outer world of wicked-

ness—all this gave time for the villain to escape ; but not before I had seen a shape, a form, a man in dirty clothes, with something like a sack or pannier on his shoulders, vanishing into obscurity among the trees, down one of the side-walks. I went to Monsieur de Vilette—he and his men were searching the grounds—and I said :

“ “ Is it, then, true, monsieur, that no one, absolutely, has been found, except the poor Monsieur de Castelnau, whom we all know so well ? ”

“ “ Absolutely, madame—no one,” he replied.

“ “ Indeed ? No one ? ” said one of your—your handsome Englishmen, dear Mademoiselle de Boisfontaine (for I call all the English mademoiselle’s own !). “ Indeed ! no one ? ” said one of these brave, pugnacious islanders (not in sweet tones, either). “ But what, then, messieurs of the guards, do you make about the two workmen, villains, whom I much desired to beat, to

knock down, to cane with my stick ! especially the one-eyed wretch with the basket ?”

“ Ah,” said De Vilette, with a bow (very polite, but objecting to interference), “ that is what you call confusion of the innocent with the so guilty. The man with the basket was the King’s own smith, and the other his comrade. Every day he is at Versailles, or Fontainebleau, or here at Trianon, or wherever there is work for his craft. I myself saw him, and at once asked, Had he seen anyone about, having no business here ? He showed his own permit, and a lock of one of the Queen’s closets, which he was about to take home to repair. He had seen no one.”

‘ For my part,’ concluded Madame d’Ossun, ‘ I tell you all that I have seen that man at Versailles ; he is, *mes belles*, a monster of ugliness, and his so depraved face gives me, without fail, the megrims when I meet him, wandering, tame, yet so fierce-

looking, in the corridors ! I could think it was Monsieur le Diable himself.'

Antoinette, leaning back in her corner of the carriage, listened to this narrative with what sensations may be imagined.





NOTES.

NOTE A.

It is pleasant to know that in the day of her agony, France, in the person of her children, was succoured nobly by England, as the following details will testify :

‘Mr. John Wilmot’ (says Fishe), ‘Edmund Burke, and Sir Philip Metcalfe framed and put into the English newspapers an appeal for aid to the French emigrés, who, now convinced that any hope they might have cherished of return to France and their estates and homes was for ever at an end, were coming in ever-increasing numbers, amongst them a large proportion of the 50,000 priests who were turned adrift penniless and houseless to escape, if they could, with bare life.

‘This first appeal produced £33,775 15s. 9½d. The following year another appeal was made in the same behalf, and headed by the King of England, George III. By this the sum of £41,304 12s. 6¾d. was raised.

‘On these funds being exhausted, the English Parliament sanctioned a regular grant for ecclesiastical and lay French emigrants on June 6th, 1806. The amounts given in all reached £1,864,825 9s. 8d.’

NOTE B.

The following extracts are made from a curious and interesting collection of newspaper cuttings in the possession of a friend of the writer's. Some of these dates are as far back as 1764, and many of them relate to the events of the Great Revolution, and the alarm and horror which it aroused in this country :

PROPHECY RESPECTING FRANCE.

Extract from a religious discourse preached by Robert Fleming, Verb. Dei. Minist., printed by Andrew Bele, Cornhill, 1701, now (1792-3) in the Library of Sir George Young, Bart. :

From the xvth chapter of the Revelations, 8th and 9th verses, on the pouring out of the fourth vial on the sun.

'There is good ground,' says Dr. Fleming, 'to hope that about the beginning of another century things again may alter for the better, for I cannot but believe that some new mortification of the supporters of Antichrist will then happen, and perhaps the French monarchy may begin to be considerably humbled.

'About that time (1701) the present French King, Louis XIV., took the sun for his emblem, and for his motto, "*Nec pluribus instar.*" He may at length, or rather his successor, and the monarchy itself, be forced to acknowledge that, in respect to neighbouring potentates, he is "*singulis instar.*" But as to the expiration of this vial, I fear it will not be till the end of the year 1794.'

Here he (the preacher) gives his reasons (page 34), and continues :

'I must tell you that I have nothing farther to add as to the time ; but as to the manner, our text lays the foundation of some more distant thoughts : therefore, in the last place, we may justly suppose that the French monarchy, after it has scorched the nations around it, will itself consume in its own flame. Its fire, and the fuel that maintains it, wasting

insensibly till it be exhausted towards the end of the present century.'

From the same delightful collection of newspaper clips, discoloured with age, and many of them relating to events in France from long before the death of Mirabeau to the first years of the present century, we have gathered the following :

'Prediction' of St. Cesaire, Bishop of Arles, in the year 542.

Taken from a book entitled '*Liber Mirabilis*.' Printed in Gothic characters, and deposited in the Royal Library at Paris.*

'The administration of this kingdom (*France*, the English translator is careful to explain) shall be so blinded that they shall leave it without defenders: the Hand of God shall extend itself over them, and over all the rich.

'All the nobles shall be deprived of their estates and their dignities.

'A division shall spring up in the Church of God; and there shall be two husbands, the one true and the other adulterous.

'The legitimate husband shall be put to flight. There shall be a great carnage, and as great an effusion of blood as in the time of the Gentiles. The Universal Church and the whole world shall deplore the ruin and destruction of a most celebrated city—the capital and mistress of France. The altars of the temple shall be destroyed; the holy virgins outraged shall fly from their monasteries; the Church pastors shall be driven from their seats; and the Church shall be clipped of her temporal goods.

'But at length the Black Eagle and the Lion shall appear, arriving from far countries.

'Misery be to thee, O city of opulence! thou shalt at first rejoice, but thy end shall come! Misery be to thee, O city of philosophy! thou shalt be subjected!

* This book has been *verifié* (authenticated, attested) at the King's Library at Paris, where a unique original of the work is deposited.

‘A captive King, humbled even to confusion, shall at last recover his crown, and shall destroy the children of Brutus.’

It is curious to read after this the description of that monument of pride and despotism, *Marly au Roi*, created from a desert of uncultivated and arid land by Louis XIV.—*The St. James’s Chronicle*.

‘The very extensive gardens of Marly ascended to the Pavilion of the Sun, which was occupied only by the King and his family. The pavilions of the twelve zodiacal signs bounded the two sides of the lawn. They were connected by bowers impervious to the rays of the sun. The pavilions nearest to that of the Sun were reserved for the princes of the blood, and ministers : the rest were occupied by persons holding superior offices at Court, or invited to stay at Marly. Each pavilion was named after fresco paintings, which covered its walls, and which had been executed by the most celebrated artists of the age of Louis XIV. On a line with the upper pavilion there was, on the left, a chapel ; on the right, a pavilion, called La Perspective, which concealed a long suite of offices, containing a hundred lodging-rooms—intended for the persons belonging to the service of the Court—kitchens, and spacious dining-rooms, in which more than thirty tables were splendidly laid out.’—MADAME CAMPAN.

Again : ‘Half-way from St. Germain to Versailles was the little Château of Marly, at the bottom of the valley ; in building it Louis XIV. mocked at the laws of nature. Machines were invented to carry thither the largest trees, roots and all, so that they might be more speedily enjoyed. Work went on night and day ; there was an endeavour to perform prodigies. It was necessary to descend a steep hill to reach the Château. . . . This pavilion was considered the palace of the God of Day, and twelve smaller ones placed round the lawn represented the signs of the zodiac.’

Madame Campan says : ‘Not the slightest trace of all this splendour remains ; the Revolutionary spoilers even tore up the pipes which served to supply the fountains.’

NOTE C.

Among the characteristics which denoted the goodness of the Queen (says Madame Campan), her respect for personal liberty should have a place. I have seen her put up with the most troublesome importunities from people whose minds were deranged, rather than have them arrested. Her patient kindness was put to a very disagreeable trial by an ex-councillor of the Bordeaux Parliament, named Castelnau.

This man declared himself the lover of the Queen, and was generally known by that appellation. For ten successive years did he follow the Court in all its excursions. Pale and wan, as people who are out of their senses usually are, his sinister appearance occasioned the most uncomfortable sensations. During the two hours that the Queen's public card-parties lasted he would remain opposite her Majesty. He placed himself in the same manner before her at chapel, and never failed to be at the King's dinner or the dinner in public. At the theatre he invariably seated himself as near the Queen's box as possible.

He always set off for Fontainebleau, or Saint Cloud, the day before the Court; and when her Majesty arrived at her various residences, the first person she met on getting out of her carriage was this melancholy madman, who never spoke to anyone. When the Queen stayed at Petit Trianon, the passion of this unhappy man became still more annoying. He would hastily swallow a morsel at some eating-house, and spend the rest of the day in going round and round the gardens, always walking at the edge of the moat. The Queen frequently met him when she was either alone or with her children, and yet she would not suffer any violence to be used to relieve her from this intolerable annoyance.

Having one day given M. de Sèze permission to enter Trianon, she sent to desire he would come to me (Madame Campan adds), and directed me to inform that celebrated advocate of M. de Castelnau's derangement, and then to send for him, that M. de Sèze might have some conversation with him.

M. de Sèze talked to him for nearly an hour, and made considerable impression upon his mind ; and at last M. de Castelnau requested me to inform the Queen, positively, that since his presence was disagreeable to her he would retire to his province. The Queen was very much rejoiced, and requested me to express her full satisfaction to M. de Sèze.

Half an hour after M. de Sèze was gone, the unhappy madman was announced. He came to tell me that he withdrew his promise ; that he had not sufficient command of himself to give up seeing the Queen as often as possible. This new determination was a disagreeable message to take to her Majesty ; but how was I affected at hearing her say, ‘ Well, let him annoy me ! But let him not be deprived of the blessing of freedom ! ’

On the arrest of the King and Queen at Varennes, this unfortunate Castelnau attempted to starve himself to death. The people in whose house he lived, becoming uneasy at his absence, had the door of his room forced open, when he was found stretched senseless on the floor. I do not know what became of him after August 10th.—MADAME CAMPAN.’

END OF VOL. I.

